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The Image and the Body in Modern Fiction's Representations of Terrorism:

Embodying the Brutality of Spectacle

by

Elizabeth M. Sage

Submitted for Examination for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Critical Theory

University of Sussex

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Dedicated to

Maidy Sage

(1917 - 2011)

and

Iris Pearce

(1926 - 2012)

Women whose warmth, strength, and determination will continue
to inspire all those who knew them.

Submission Statement

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been, and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Elizabeth Sage

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Date:

University of Sussex

Elizabeth Sage

For Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Critical Theory

**The Image and the Body in Modern Fiction's Representations of Terrorism: Embodying the
Brutality of Spectacle**

Summary

My research arises from a critique of the tendency within terrorism debates to equate the terrorist act with the production of spectacular images. Chapter 1 uses the work of Luce Irigaray to critique this trend in terrorism discourses, arguing that such a characterisation relies on a repression of the very materiality that terrorist action exploits. Moreover, placing the concept of terror in an Irigarayan framework reveals that the concept of terrorism is bound up with concepts of masculinity. In developing this critical approach, I build on the thinking of both Irigaray and Gayatri Spivak in turning to literary representations of terrorism to find a means of articulating a new understanding of the concept of terrorism and its place within our culture.

Chapter 2 brings together the figure of the woman terrorist in terrorism studies, Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter* (1979), and Doris Lessing's *The Good Terrorist* (1985) in order to critique the portrayal of the feminine in terrorism discourses. Chapter 3 then moves on to ask how the global reach of terrorism discourses after September 11th, 2001, has impacted on our understanding of masculinity and femininity, looking at the relationship between the body and subjectivity in Ian McEwan's *Saturday* (2006). Finally, Chapter 4 examines how Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007) figures the body as a site of resistance to such global narratives of terror, as he explores the possibility of an embodied ethics opening up a suspension of photographic and filmic modes of perception.

By setting up a dialogue between terrorism studies and literary fiction, I reintroduce the body to our conceptualisation of terrorism. In doing so, I show how literature can open up new ethical horizons in an otherwise closed rhetoric.

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Introduction

In the opening decade of the twenty-first century, anxieties about terrorism came to shape global politics in a manner they had hitherto failed to do. In the days, weeks, and years after al-Qaeda's attacks on the United States of America (U.S.) on September 11th, 2001, discourses about terrorism gained an unprecedented purchase on domestic and international policies across the world. Within the U.S. and countries like the United Kingdom (U.K.), we saw radical recalibrations of civil liberties. The Bush administration instituted the Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act (USA PATRIOT) in October 2001, while Tony Blair's government brought in the Prevention of Terrorism Act in 2005, an act that allowed the Home Secretary to issue Control Orders designed to limit an individual's freedom even if there was not sufficient evidence to charge him or her with terrorist offenses. On an international scale, the U.S. and its largely Western allies pursued wars in Afghanistan and Iraq in the name of counter-terrorism, ultimately rejecting the authority of the United Nations in favour of asserting their right to unilateral action by citing the need to protect themselves from future terrorist atrocity. Yet if the rights of the U.S. and its allies were paramount, the suspension of the Geneva Conventions within these theatres of war suggested that the spectre of terrorism facilitated a convenient forgetting of the rights of those who were not Western, be they terrorist or not. As the Bush administration used a series of legal sleights-of-hand to construct their enclave in Cuba's Guantanamo Bay as a space external to U.S. and international law and countries across Europe co-operated with extraordinary rendition, it seemed that the logic of counter-terrorism led the West to rethink their notions of human rights. Rather than a call for universal equality and recognition, counter-terrorism facilitated the installation of a hierarchy of freedom, prescribing a little less for "us" and absolutely none for "them", distinctions made according to the whims of the powers that be.

Behind the policies and the political rhetoric that continue to shape the global and domestic spheres even as later administrations attempt to rescind some of the changes made by their predecessors,¹ there lies a wealth of research into terrorism and counter-terrorist strategies. Thus, while critical engagement with the politicians and policies they espouse is vital for placing counter-terrorist actions under scrutiny, this thesis suggests that it is similarly

¹ In the U.S., Barak Obama has struggled to dismantle Guantanamo Bay since the beginning of his presidency in 2005, while David Cameron's Home Secretary Theresa May reworked the Control Order legislation to install a new, less restrictive order, but still one that allows increased surveillance of the individual under the order.

important to place the research and advice that inform these policies under the critical lens. For while administrations can change, the same is not necessarily true of the material and expertise that politicians turn to when formulating their response to terrorism. We need to ask what is at work in the discourses around terrorism that allows such a bullish assertion of unilateral authority and the radical negation of the rights of others if we are to instigate lasting change in counter-terrorist policy, a change that does not rely on the tides of political interest.

In order to answer this question, this thesis locates terrorism discourses within a cultural context, figuring them as expressing a set of culturally-constructed concepts that rely on a specific set of *a priori* epistemological assumptions. Moreover, given that terrorism is widely understood as a form of 'symbolic' action, in Chapter 1, I suggest that a psychoanalytic approach allows us to unearth both these assumptions and the manner in which they were installed. Specifically, I argue that the psychoanalytically-informed philosophy of Luce Irigaray gives us a means of understanding why violent action is read as producing symbolic effects. Moreover, I go on to suggest that her modelling of the relationship between culture and the material world opens up the prospect that terrorism discourses are shaped by an investment in reinstalling a particular kind of subjectivity in the wake of terrorist violence; that of the phallic masculine that Western cultural traditions have taken as the norm. While I suggest this investment manifests itself throughout terrorism studies, it is in the figuring of the mass audience presumed to be terrorised by the media's reporting of terrorist atrocity that the presumption of a phallic norm becomes particularly apparent. As I shall demonstrate, such figurings rely on the disavowal of difference and the material body that Irigaray locates at the heart of the cultural symbolic which installs the phallic masculine as the normative subject. I then take up Irigaray and Gayatri Spivak's claim that different manifestations of our cultural symbolic are capable of interacting with each other in a critical way, by placing the research that makes up the emerging academic discipline of 'Terrorism Studies' alongside philosophical attempts to rethink counter-terrorism in an ethical way. In doing so, I suggest that attempts by Jean Baudrillard, Slavoj Žižek, Jürgen Habermas, and Jacques Derrida are limited in their ethical capacity insofar as they share terrorism discourses' conceptual ground, similarly forgetting the body and difference in their efforts to rethink terrorism.

If the philosophical sphere is limited in its ability to critique terrorism discourses, I suggest that literary fiction's particular relationship to the symbolic conventions that shape our culture mean it is in literary representations of terrorism that we may find a way of reformulating our understanding of terrorism. Arguing that terrorism discourses take the phallic masculine to be the universal subject suggests that the global influence such discourses have attained has very specific consequences for women across the world. First, critiquing the

way in which recent terrorism studies figure the feminine, I then turn to two novels written prior to September 11th, 2001, Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter* (1979) and Doris Lessing's *The Good Terrorist* (1985). In comparing the way in which Gordimer and Lessing represent the woman activist or terrorist with the modelling of the female terrorist in studies produced in the last decade, I throw into relief the extent to which terrorism discourses rely on a conservative notion of femininity. Moreover, I suggest that in doing so, terrorism discourses not only threaten to covertly install these notions at a legislative level as counter-terrorism becomes paramount, but that it is only through relying on such conservative ideals that the epistemology of terrorism can presume to "know" the terrorist Other and thus articulate counter-terrorist policy.

Having demonstrated that in their pre-September 11th fiction, Gordimer and Lessing specifically figure the body as a site that resists the epistemological appropriation that facilitates the narratives of terrorism discourses, in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, I turn to two post-September 11th novels, Ian McEwan's *Saturday* (2006) and Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007). Both McEwan and DeLillo explicitly turn to the body as a means of articulating an ethical response to the September 11th attacks, but in reading these texts alongside terrorism discourses, it becomes apparent they do so to very different effect. I argue that McEwan's use of neuroscience to provide us with a universal model of subjectivity in fact replicates the forgetting of our materiality that facilitates terrorism discourses, leading him to agree with these discourses as he re-inscribes conservative notions of sexuality and concludes the best means of countering terrorist atrocity is a more confident assertion of the West's moral authority. In stark contrast, DeLillo once again suggests that the body is a site of resistance, this time recognising the specificity of embodied experience in order to complicate the epistemological figuring of the mass audience of terror that supports the very concept of terrorism. Thus, while *Saturday* works anxiously to draw a dividing line between the terrorist Other and the phallic masculine, DeLillo suggests that our cultural investment in the image means we are always already inextricably connected to this Other.

Therefore, this thesis adopts a different approach to critiques that situate literary representations of terrorism in terms of the author's politics or the ideology figured as motivating terrorist violence, such as Houen's *Terrorism and Modern Literature* and Scanlan's *Plotting Terror: Novelist and Terrorists in Contemporary Fiction*.² Rather, in analysing terrorism discourses as cultural products and placing them in dialogue with other cultural discourses

² Alex Houen, *Terrorism and Modern Literature from Joseph Conrad to Ciaran Carson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Margaret Scanlan, *Plotting Terror: Novelists and Terrorists in Contemporary Fiction* (Charlottesville, VA.; London: University Press of Virginia, 2001).

such literature and philosophy, I hope to expose the ways in which our understanding of terrorism is shaped by our investment in a particular set of cultural norms. I also hope to demonstrate the truth of Spivak's assertion that the Humanities has a specific role to play in the formulating an ethical approach in a world in which particular discourses gain global influence. It is this claim and its consequences that we shall now explore.

Chapter 1: An Irigarayan Intervention in the Rhetoric of Terrorism

As both a linguistic analyst and a practising psychoanalyst, Luce Irigaray's critical gesture is to always ask how a particular discourse is able to work. From her earliest analysis of the language of dementia and schizophrenic patients, through her influential and infamous critique of philosophical and psychoanalytic discourses in *Speculum Of the Other Woman*, to her present interventions concerning politics and pedagogy, Irigaray asks the same questions of each discursive convention. What assumptions are necessary to allow this discourse to unfold? What has necessarily been put aside, forgotten, repressed, to facilitate the logic of this linguistic practice? Her psychoanalytic concern with the unsaid, the excess that permits a discourse to take place, is the foundational gesture of her philosophy. For in unveiling what constitutes the silent substratum of a discursive logic, we bring into view what – or who – has been exploited in order to sustain that discourse. Such an unveiling opens up the possibility of an ethical transformation, as becoming aware of what is silenced and forgotten by our language gives us the means to rethink our utterances. For Irigaray, the psychoanalytic gesture is the start of an ethical relation to the other. To ask what is at stake in the metaphysics, the logic, and the construction of any language is to reveal both who the normative subject is presumed to be, and also what forms of subjectivity have been appropriated, forgotten, and marked as excess to establish this normativity. Only by recognising how the subject producing the discourse makes use of others can we begin to refigure our language and our thinking in an ethical way, in a manner that strives to no longer exploit or appropriate otherness. Irigaray claims that, in understanding terrorism, it is first necessary to ask 'How is our own culture terrorist? How does our culture provoke terrorism?'³ Instead of remaining within the terms put forward by terrorism's targets and terrorists themselves, we need to look at how the structures that underpin our cultures and our subjectivities bring about the possibility of terrorism. To accept, as others have done, that the contemporary moment is 'a time of terror'⁴ is to allow the cycle of terror-counterterror to continue. As we shall see, for Irigaray, remaining within cultural traditions perpetuates terror. To break the cycle, we need to recognise that '[v]iolence is the exhibition of an internal violence – we are living in a time of exhibition.'⁵

What is the source of this internal violence and how might it translate into what is described as terrorist activity? Throughout her oeuvre, Irigaray has employed psychoanalytic and linguistic analyses to unearth the foundations of traditional Western metaphysics and the

³ Luce Irigaray, 'Luce Irigaray International Seminar' (University of Bristol, June 14, 2011).

⁴ Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

⁵ Irigaray, 'Luce Irigaray International Seminar'.

cultures grounded in them. Across philosophical, linguistic, psychoanalytic, and political practices, to mention but a few, Irigaray consistently demonstrates that cultures following a Western tradition are constituted through a fundamental disavowal of humanity's embodied nature. For Irigaray, such cultures rest on an absolute severance of the living body from the symbolic structures that shape our societies and our subjectivity. This repression of the body, this refusal to recognise ourselves as embodied subjects, is the violent act that is internal to our culture and thus inscribes violence into the very roots of our societies. As Irigaray puts it, 'The cut between the body, the lived, the sensible, and culture is inherently terrorist, because it means we forget life.'⁶ This is a radical claim and seems counter-intuitive to the popular understanding of terrorism. After all, a terrorist act is widely regarded as an attack on a system or culture that comes from outside, inflicted by people who locate themselves as somehow external to the systems they target. Yet even a brief perusal of the discourses produced by European, American, and Israeli sources regarding terrorism suggests Irigaray is making an astute point. Something resembling this disconnect between the body, the material world, and culture manifests itself in the widespread reading of terrorism as a form of symbolic action.

Although the explanations of how terrorism is symbolic, and what is meant by 'symbolic', vary greatly throughout the discourse on terrorism, there is little doubt that it is deemed an appropriate means for interpreting terrorist action. The U.S. Army Manual adopts a layman's definition of 'symbolic': 'the greater the symbolic value of the target, the more publicity the attack brings to the terrorists and the more fear it generates,'⁷ referring to cultural, political or historical meanings attached to the target. Terrorism academics such as Hoffman and Whittaker argue that terrorism is 'specifically designed to have far-reaching psychological effects beyond the immediate victim or object of the terrorist attack,'⁸ and that it holds 'symbolic appeal' as it 'projects images, communicates messages and creates myths that transcend historical circumstances and motivate future generations.'⁹ Anthropologists Zulaika and Douglass discuss the way in which terrorism is read as making one person or target symbolise an entire class of people, before positing that a Freudian approach suggests this kind of thinking by both the terrorists and their targets 'is reminiscent of the inability of so-called

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, *The Basics: Combatting Terrorism*, 2003, <http://www.terrorism.com/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&sid=5671&mode=thead&order=0&thold=0>.

⁸ Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (London: Indigo, 1998), 15; cited in David J. Whittaker, ed., *The Terrorism Reader* (London: Routledge, 2007), 9.

⁹ Whittaker, *Terrorism Reader*, 13.

primary-process or unconscious thinking to discriminate between “some” and “all” . . .¹⁰ Žižek places the symbolic nature of terrorism in a full-blown psychoanalytic framework with a view to analysing the roots of its symbolism and the impact such actions have on a culture’s symbolic economy, as defined in Lacanian terms.

This small sample is representative of the wider trend in terrorism discourses, as we shall see. From this brief overview, it is clear that within terrorism discourses, terrorism attacks the symbolic, is symbolic, and has effects within the symbolic. Be it at the level of policy-making, terrorism studies, media representation, or philosophical critique, there is an underlying assumption in discussions of terrorism that material physical action can translate into symbolic effect. Yet the mechanisms that permit such a transition between physical and symbolic are for the most part left unexamined. Instead, it is taken as a given that physical events will have symbolic consequences for an entire community, society, culture. Given that terrorism is universally read as deliberately exploiting both the potential for symbolic action and the impact such action has on the target, it seems curious that so little attention is paid to how physical violence becomes symbolic, or how a target is invested with symbolic importance. Most curious of all is that lack of investigation into how a physical attack in a specific location becomes symbolically significant for an entire populous. What is the nature of this powerful connection between material action and the symbolic that terrorism makes such effective use of?

The relative silence around this question is in keeping with Irigaray’s description of the cut between body and culture, the living world and our symbolic structures. In the rapid transition terrorism discourses make between physical action and symbolic implications, they ‘forget’ to provide an account of how the physical relates to the symbolic. Instead, the physicality of terrorism is swiftly relocated into the symbolic, interpreted at a cultural level that renders the actual violence that took place as almost incidental. This in itself is indicative of a severance between body and culture and is a form of symbolic violence as we shall explore later. Yet is this failure to connect body and culture really ‘terrorist’? Can it really be seen as evidence that the seeds of terrorist violence can be found within a culture rather than in the margins it emerges from in the popular imagination?

Looking at specific instances of this symbolic interpretation of terrorism and the consequences of such an approach can shed some light on the validity of Irigaray’s claim. The attacks on the U.S. on September 11th, 2001, provide a compelling example. Across the political and cultural spectrum, there seems little doubt that these attacks were in some form

¹⁰ Joseba Zulaika and William A. Douglass, *Terror and Taboo: The Follies, Fables, and Faces of Terrorism* (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), 134.

symbolic. Osama bin Laden claimed that the 'targets were America's icons of military and economic power,'¹¹ and served as part of an Islamic jihad against America and its allies. By reading the Pentagon and World Trade Center buildings as symbols of American power, then associating the attacks on these symbols with Islamic jihad, the perpetrators' actions were imbued with a symbolic purpose: this was not just murder, it was killing in God's name. On the other hand, interpretations of the collapse of the World Trade Center Towers were inflected with the symbolic attributes accorded to the once looming buildings. People read the collapse as symbolising an attack on monolithic global capitalism, the inevitable downfall of the modern world's Babylonian overreaching, or the castration of a bloated, pampered imperial master. The official interpretation of what the attacks symbolised was swift to emerge, as George W Bush declared at a news conference 'You're either with us or against us in the fight against terror.'¹² For Bush, the attacks primarily symbolised an attack on 'us' by 'them', and thus, as bin Laden also argued, September 11th represented something like Huntington's 'clash of civilizations.'¹³ It represented a moment in which the world had to decide if they represented 'us' or 'them' in no uncertain terms. By framing the attacks in these terms, Bush asserted his nation's mastery over the epistemology of global violence. In short, unless one wanted to make an enemy of the world's largest military power, one accepted that there was a correct way to understand and read the symbolic significance of such violence, and that was the way sanctioned by the United States. Perhaps most significantly, it was not simply the military and economic might of the U.S. that shored up Bush's demand for epistemological mastery. In the aftermath of the attacks, the need to express sympathy and empathy for those who had perished and suffered in the horrific violence unleashed on that nation was at least as powerful in securing Bush's legitimacy, certainly at the levels below the national and international arenas. In other words, the deaths of thousands became emblematic of the need to support a nation in mourning. As Bush drew his line in the sand, this emotional collateral underwrote the United States' controlling stake in the post-September 11th narrative of global terrorism.

Nearly 3000 people died on that day in 2001, including citizens from 93 countries and the 19 hijackers.¹⁴ The victims not only had different nationalities, they were men and women of all ages, from a vast array of backgrounds. They were cleaners and waiters, bankers and

¹¹ Quoted in Hamid Mir, "'Muslims Have the Right to Attack America'", *The Guardian* (London, November 11, 2001), <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2001/nov/11/terrorism.afghanistan1>.

¹² <http://archives.cnn.com/2001/US/11/06/gen.attack.on.terror/>

¹³ Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations?* (Washington, DC.: American Enterprise Institute, 1992).

¹⁴ National September 11 Memorial & Museum, 'FAQs About 9/11', *9/11 Memorial*, April 25, 2012, <http://www.911memorial.org/faq-about-911>.

lawyers. They were married and single, they were gay and straight. Their politics, their religious beliefs, their personal tenets were as diverse as their own individual histories. As individuals, their lives could be taken to represent a vast array of contrasting and conflicting stances. Yet in the move to proclaim the symbolic significance of their deaths, it is precisely the specificity of the victims' individual lives that were – and are – brushed over. For Bush and bin Laden, these myriad individuals become symbolic of 'us' and 'them'. In the rush to gain mastery over the symbolic meaning of the attacks, Bush and his allies mirrored the gesture that facilitated the terrorists' actions, reductively interpreting the loss of this medley of lives as representing one thing – an attack on 'us'. The forgetting of the victims' lives, the disregard for the physical existence of the victims, allowed the significance of their deaths to be abstracted from their identities. In a very real sense, Bush and others colonised the symbolic significance of the attacks, overwriting the meaning of each individual death with a grand nationalist narrative. As thinkers such as Achille Mbembe and others have recently argued¹⁵, this colonial gesture is in itself a form of terrorism and, indeed, Irigaray argues such appropriation is emblematic of the terrorism inherent in a culture. But does such a gesture, in fact, provoke terrorism as it is commonly understood? Perhaps recent history speaks for itself. Bush's rhetoric provided the rationale for invading Afghanistan, and later Iraq, actions which have precipitated an increase in terrorist activity both on a local and international scale. The logic of terror-counterterror has demonstrably led to a perpetuation of violence as well as a curtailment of civil liberties in the very countries that are attempting to prevent terrorist attacks that target those very freedoms. Something is failing in the logic of counterterrorism, and Irigaray's analysis of western cultural practices suggests that this failure arises from the cut our culture makes between the body, the living flesh, and its symbolic structures. By maintaining such an absolute split, we mimic the terroristic gesture of colonising the individual life with a meaning that is useful to our own cause; we also appropriate the victim in the name of our own symbolic ends.

Such an appropriation thus facilitates what Zulaika and Douglass describe as 'the rhetorical circularity' that characterises much of terrorism discourses:

Once something that is called "terrorism" – no matter how loosely it is defined – becomes established in the public mind, "counterterrorism" is seemingly the only prudent course of action . . . our concern is whether the promotion of terrorism itself as a quintessential threat is necessary and useful . . . what is lacking is a serious investigation of the extent to which the discourse itself might be partly responsible for [terrorism].¹⁶

¹⁵ See Elleke Boehmer and Stephen Morton, eds., *Terror and the Postcolonia*, (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

¹⁶ Zulaika and Douglass, *Terror and Taboo*, ix–x.

While Irigaray has spoken about terrorism in response to the work of participants at the *Luce Irigaray International Seminar 2011*, she has not investigated the rhetoric around terrorism directly. However, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has detected the appropriative gesture in the rhetoric of the 'war on terror' that shaped the response of the U.S. and its allies to the September 11th attacks. Her analysis of the form and consequences of this gesture gives us a means of articulating what an Irigarayan investigation of terrorism discourses can look like, providing us with some key terms for thinking about the terrorism inherent in our own culture. In her collected ruminations on the responses to the attacks from the United States and Europe, 'Terror: a Speech After 9-11', Spivak argues that the logic of a war on terrorism is 'a cruel caricature of what in us can respond.'¹⁷ It is caricature because it is a ludicrous imitation of what it is to respond, a crude interpretation that is in fact based on the very prohibition of response. For Spivak, the colonising of the symbolic space of the attacks amounted to a presumption of the right to be the epistemological master of the global discourse on terrorist violence. Spivak suggests that in formulating a 'response' to the attacks, the U.S. and Europe mistook 'training in political science and law alone'¹⁸ as enough of a grounding for their moral stance, a mistake that inevitability left their right to control over the legislative and moral ground unexamined. By assuming the right *a priori* to examine and judge the actions of others, Bush and his allies not only reduced the possibility of responding to the attacks to a 'tit-for-tat approach'¹⁹ emblematic of terror-counterterror, they failed to place their own terms under moral scrutiny and thus pursued a course which reduced the 'work of the ethical state to the moral will alone.'²⁰ In other words, the unexamined authority of the moral masters forecloses the possibility of response, as the masters can remain within a pre-established set of terms, ensuring that they remain unaltered by the call of the other whatever form that call takes. Spivak reads this inability or reluctance to examine one's right to act as moral arbiter in Kantian terms, linking the secular state's tendency to equate moral fitness with adherence to the letter of the law to secularism's lack of a transcendental obligation. Prising open this equation within a secular framework becomes crucial for formulating a response, a gesture that takes us beyond the circuit of terror-counterterror.

For Spivak, this is necessarily an imaginative task as it entails recognising the limits of one's established epistemology. As Spivak puts it, 'response not only supposes and produces a

¹⁷ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Terror: a Speech After 9-11', *Boundary 2* 31, no. 2 (2004): 81.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 102.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

constructed subject of response, it also constructs its object.’²¹ To understand the limits of one’s own ability to act as moral arbiter, one must be able to recognise to what extent the other to which you respond is your own construct, or ‘the Other of the same’ to use an Irigarayan phrase.²² Such self-critique involves the recognition that the other has their own terms, a logic and a rationale appropriate to them, rather than always reducing the other to the terms of one’s own logic. It is a process of realising that what is irrational in one system of thought is not necessarily so in another, and of being able to imagine beyond the confines of one’s own terms in order to conceive, no matter in how limited a sense, of what a term, an action, an ideal, may mean in a radically other system. For Spivak, epistemology necessarily works against this imaginative process, by implying that the other can be known and understood in terms appropriate to the subject seeking to know the other. Unearthing what is at work in such epistemologies, as Irigaray asks us to do, becomes a specifically ethical intervention in Spivak’s terms:

I understand the ethical . . . to be an interruption of the epistemological, which is the attempt to construct the other as object of knowledge. Epistemological constructs belong to the domain of the law, which seeks to know the other, in his or her case, as completely as possible, in order to punish or acquit rationally, reason being defined by the limits set by the law itself. The ethical interrupts this imperfectly, to listen to the other as if it were a self, neither to punish nor to acquit.²³

If epistemology entails the hegemonic construction of the other in terms that are not the other’s own, the ethical then becomes that which interrupts the logic of the epistemological in order that the other can speak, can be heard in its own terms. This interruption cannot take the form of a pre-established claim on behalf of the other: to truly interrupt an epistemological narrative, the intervention must be ‘imperfect’, unexpected, problematic, in that it is not anticipated or deemed appropriate to existing convention. To be otherwise is to simply stake a claim for a form of anterior alterity, overwriting the other once again. Similarly, the ethical precedes the possibility of response, for without an interruption of the epistemological, it is not possible to respond to the other. Instead, the subject remains within its own terms and so responds to the other which it has constructed, its epistemological object. The subject remains shouting in the palace of its own discourse, presuming the other to be at the gates, whilst the other remains, unheard, unseen, unanswered in their own realm.

²¹ Ibid., 82.

²² Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 100.

²³ Spivak, ‘Terror’, 83.

The substitution of the other for the epistemologically-constructed Other²⁴ has a very real impact on our ability to study terrorism and produce informed counter-terrorist policy. For Professor Andrew Silke, one of the U.K.'s foremost terrorism experts, the September 11th attacks were testament to the failure of terrorism studies as a science. Silke is not alone when he argues that 'Good science is fundamentally all about prediction. Good science *allows* reliable prediction.'²⁵ For Silke, the fact there was only one scholarly article published on al-Qaeda in the 1990s demonstrates a failure of research as well as a failure of governmental intelligence.²⁶ Silke traces the relative paucity of robust research on terrorism to various sources, be it the tendency of terrorism studies to concentrate on hostage-taking situations, the constraints put on scientific method when carrying out studies in hostile real-world contexts, or the relative neglect of terrorism as an object of study until recent years, which consigned 'the science of terror . . . [to] the cracks and crevices which lie between the large academic disciplines.'²⁷ These are all aspects of the rhetoric of terror that we shall return to in greater depth. But for now, in light of Spivak's analysis, can we not speculate that the inadequacy of the science of terror is a direct consequence of a refusal to engage with the terrorist as other? Are both the failures to predict terrorist behaviour and to prevent it through counter-terrorist action an indication that in talking about terrorism, we are in fact still talking to ourselves, about ourselves? It is the terrorist constructed by our own epistemologies that we study and respond to with counter-terrorist violence. Thus, until we find a means to move beyond such an epistemological impasse, the terrorist will continue to elude us and remain impervious to actions we label 'responses'. It seems without an ethical interruption on behalf of the other, all counter-terrorism will be is a caricature of its intent.

Spivak's claim is a radical one. In essence, she is asking that we enact an ethical suspension of our epistemological frameworks in the name of an other who is overtly hostile. In placing the onus on those who presume themselves to be the epistemological masters of terrorism, Spivak is echoing Irigaray's insistence that it is first necessary to ask how our own culture is terrorist. Spivak posits that the disciplines that make up the Humanities are uniquely suited to enacting such an ethical intervention, thanks to the potential for the cultivation of the imagination within their practices. For Spivak, the Humanities as a discipline 'teaches us to

²⁴ In line with Irigaray, I take the Other to designate the epistemologically-constructed Other, while the other refers to the irreducibly other, who cannot be accounted for in terms not appropriate to themselves.

²⁵ Andrew Silke, ed., *Research on Terrorism: Trends, Achievements and Failures* (London: Frank Cass, 2004), 23.

²⁶ Ibid., 22.

²⁷ Ibid., 10, 11, & 1–2. respectively.

learn from the singular and the unverifiable,²⁸ placing it in the position to intervene and reflect on epistemological hegemonies that work to preclude the other and the possibility of response. It is because these disciplines can throw an unimagined spanner in the works of an epistemological machine that they must take up and insist upon their role as the essential training for an ethical approach that can move us beyond the damaging rhetoric of ‘us’ and ‘them’. The strength of the Humanities lies in the ability to ethically intervene in such thinking by proceeding imaginatively, imperfectly, to think their way out of the epistemological box that surrounds a discourse.

Not least in the Humanities’ imaginative arsenal is the potential for self-reflective critique, a critical approach that recognises that it is not simply an object, or an other-as-object, that is constructed by a discourse, but also the subject presumed to be the master of that discourse. As Spivak’s formulation of the relationship between subject and object in response suggests, at the root of any epistemological approach lies an *a priori* subject, assumptions about which are inscribed into the epistemological framework with varying degrees of subtlety. An ethical intervention is one in which this presumed subject is boycotted in favour of the other, in order to disrupt ‘the idea that knowledge is an end in itself, or that there is a straight line from knowing to doing politics as human rights’.²⁹ Instead of aligning oneself with the epistemological master, the subject disrupts the epistemic flow in order that the other can be ‘imagined as a self’, can be heard in its own terms, whatever the cost to the subject’s own sense of self. Then, and only then, can there be a possibility of response, for the other is heard, rather than spoken about, for, or over. To be open to response is inevitably to take an incalculable risk with one’s own sense of self, as one lays oneself bare to the call of the other. Yet without this risk, as Spivak suggests, there is no such thing as response:

[T]o respond means to resonate with the other, contemplate the possibility of complicity – wrenching consciousness-raising, which is based on “knowing things,” however superficially, from its complacency. Response pre-figures change.³⁰

We shall return to the relationship between response and figuration as we look at Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man*. For now, I wish to remain with Spivak’s thinking a moment longer in order to explore the methodological implications of her assertions.

Having argued that epistemological practices foreclose the possibility of meaningful response and interaction with the supposed object of study, Spivak dedicates much of ‘Terror: A Speech After 9-11’ to demonstrating the various ways the type of practices used in the

²⁸ Spivak, ‘Terror’, 109.

²⁹ Ibid., 87.

³⁰ Ibid., 87.

Humanities problematise and disrupt the epistemological object of the Islamic terrorist as constructed by the West's post-September 11th rhetoric. She does so not simply by bringing this rhetoric into contact with dissenting or non-Western voices, but by placing it alongside other forms of discourse. She refers to anthropological studies, journalism, psychoanalytic references, philosophical thought on the sublime, and at least three literary works in her attempts to shift the epistemological paradigm.³¹ Spivak delineates the blindspots of the dominant epistemology by bringing it into proximity with other discursive forms, suggesting that these 'alternative' discourses have a different epistemic framework or at least have a different relation to the prevailing model. It is because each discourse occupies a different position in relation to master discourse that they are able to shed light on how that discourse unfolds. The contrasts between the dominant and alternative voices expose the ways in which louder voice fails to recognise the specificity of the other. Thus, even different discursive practices within our own culture can facilitate an ethical interruption on behalf of the other. This has particular significance for Irigaray's demand for cultural self-reflection, as we shall see.

Spivak enacts her critique in order to extract the other from the West's construction of the Other. Irigaray's appeal for us to examine our own culture requires us to turn our focus elsewhere. Instead of demonstrating an epistemology's limits by rethinking the object, Irigaray's question is addressed to the subject producing the epistemology, the presumed master of the discourse. In order to further elucidate the mechanisms at work, we need to ask what presumptions are made in order to allow that master to speak. What normative notions of subjectivity are installed to allow an epistemology to talk about the other? Who is being rendered as 'us' when we refer to 'them'? What is being legitimated when the object under examination is labelled as 'terrorist'? These questions become all the more pertinent when a particular power or constellation of powers have claimed authority over the global episteme of terrorism. As we shall see, 'terrorism' is a malleable term, able to apply itself to anything the dominant system regards as an illegitimate threat, and thus to label an object as terrorist is to mute it twice over; once by marking it out-of-bounds as terrorist, and secondly by overwriting the other as the object of one's own construction. Therefore, the terrorist other is as long-lived and varied as the systems of power that designate them as such, meaning the potential damage the power-that-be can do in pursuit of the terrorist other is similarly sustained and unexpected. In asking what lies behind the need to render certain acts as terrorist, we can begin to shift the epistemological framework from within, rather than constantly relying on the

³¹ Specifically, Spivak refers to the novels Viken Berberian, *The Cyclist* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002); Patricia Grace, *Baby No-Eyes* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998); Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (London: Eurospan, 2009); Spivak, 'Terror', 97, 110 and 111 respectively.

persistence of others to alert us to its limits. More than this, in answering these questions, we become aware of how our own methods for understanding the world impact on our own culture; we shed light on the disfiguring effects on our own identity brought about by our failure to respond to the other.

Irigaray's call, then, complements Spivak's critical gesture.³² Placing terrorism discourses in an Irigarayan framework allows us to analyse them as a cultural product, in order to unmask the mechanisms that permit the discourse to unfold. In doing so, we discover not only how we make use of the other, but why. Exposing the deep-seated need to appropriate the other gives us the means to rethink our epistemological practices in an ethical way, in a manner that opens us up to the possibility of response. Furthermore, as I shall demonstrate, Irigaray's description of the connection between our current symbolic conventions and the physical world not only explains, but predicts the forms and failings of terrorism discourses, as well as anticipates the persistence of their present approach despite of its overt contradictions and deficiencies. One of the strongest claims for the appropriateness of an Irigarayan ethics to address the task laid down by Spivak is the absolute insistence in Irigaray's thought that to work with the abstract alone is to neglect the other, to risk doing violence to the other, as well as to forget ourselves. Attempting to dislodge the current epistemological regime around terrorism is unavoidably perilous, as its borders are necessarily shaped by atrocity, and thus trying to open up, alter or interrupt the current structure risks trampling over the countless individuals who have been murdered, injured or in some other way damaged by such incidents. Irigaray's insistence that an ethical culture can only emerge from a recognition of sexuate difference, in which the abstract is never severed from our bodily identity, helps us articulate a critique of terrorism discourses that makes every effort not to forget, make use of, or disrespect the suffering of others. Indeed, it perhaps gives us the opportunity to prevent the epistemological machine making use of the largely silent victims of terrorist violence, in challenging its claim to speak for them. Thus, in reading terrorism discourses through Irigaray's specific understanding of the relation between the symbolic and the body, we attempt to counteract Bush's colonising gesture.

³² Indeed, Spivak herself refers to the work of Irigaray and Jacques Derrida as exemplifying the kind possibilities contained with psychoanalytic thought for formulating an ethical response. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Responsibility – 1992: Testing Theory in the Plains', in *Other Asias* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 61.

The Cut Between Culture and Life

Discourses about terrorism permeate countless spheres – the public, the political, the media, the economic, the fictional and entertainment, the academic. As a phenomenon assumed to be able to affect anyone, anywhere, terrorism is a topic about which everyone is entitled to a say. However, there is a hierarchy amongst the myriad voices staking claim to expertise. The terrorism expert is central to political, media and, through these, popular discourses about terrorism. Although, as we shall see, the terrorism expert can come in many guises, the primary task required of this expert is to define what ‘terrorism’ actually is, in order that he or she can aid the wider political and public spheres in formulating an appropriate and justifiable response. So who are the terrorism experts? Broadly speaking, it is possible to discern two distinct strands in the discourses of terrorism expertise. On the one hand, we have authors, writers and academics whose work has an overt epistemological agenda, based on the premise that it is possible to know the terrorist and thus thwart their actions. Until recent decades, this type of work has been carried out in an informal, if remarkably consistent, manner, although it is now rapidly coalescing into the recognisable academic discipline of ‘Terrorism Studies.’ The second form of expertise is the comparatively esoteric philosophical analysis of terrorism. As Spivak’s intervention illustrates, the philosophical engagement with terrorism frequently eschews the epistemological and instead concerns itself with the ethical perspective, the symbolic consequences, the form a response to terror could, and should, take. There is currently remarkably little dialogue between the two strands, arguably leaving both sides worse off – the careful ethics of the philosophical approaches rarely make it to the ears that matter, while the infinitely more influential terrorism studies experts lack an ethical subtlety that could prove invaluable in changing the terrain of terrorism policies. Despite this lack of interaction and the contrasting concerns, the shared frame of reference inevitably means that these strands of expertise overlap. As we examine the trends within the epistemological and philosophical approaches to terrorism through Irigaray’s psychoanalytically-informed theory, these overlaps become more than coincidences resulting from a shared topic. They are indicative of a common cultural practice, instances where both approaches enact the same forgetting in order to let their discourse unfold. Such coincidences, then, alert us to the blind-spots in our understanding of terrorism and mark the spaces in which the possibility of an ethical intervention has been foreclosed. In order to detect such moments and to understand why they emerge at particular points, we first need to examine what Irigaray means when she argues that there is a cut between the symbolic and the body, between culture and the material world.

As I have already suggested, Luce Irigaray's philosophy and politics are fundamentally grounded in psychoanalytic thought. To forget this, or to be inattentive to the continued influence of psychoanalytic practice on Irigaray's work, is to miss the subtleties and significance of her claims. Hence, although much has been written about Irigaray's earliest work, it is necessary to briefly revisit it here in order to fully appreciate the nuances and consequences of what Irigaray reads as the split between life and culture.

Irigaray argues that our culture rests on a fundamental disavowal of our maternal, material origins and as such, relies on a fundamental cut between our bodies and our culture. This disavowal is a specific consequence of the fact that our symbolic follows a phallic morphology. Thus, Irigaray concurs with Freud and Lacan in so far as she argues that in its current manifestation, the law of the father and the primacy of the phallus are paramount in our culture. Indeed, Lacan's modelling of the relationship between the imaginary, the symbolic and the real are crucial for Irigaray's analysis and philosophy, as shall become apparent. But Irigaray's thought diverges from that of both men in her refusal to let the movement of psychoanalysis cease with the espousal of the Oedipal complex and the recognition of the phallus as the foundational signifier of our symbolic order. Her fundamental critical gesture, then, is to place the discourse of psychoanalysis under a psychoanalytic lens. Why is it, she asks, that Freud can talk of penis envy, but does not allow for the possibility of breast envy, or more poignantly, womb envy? For as Irigaray puts it, 'one might be able to interpret the fact of being deprived of a womb as the most intolerable deprivation of man, since his contribution to gestation – his function with regard to the origin of reproduction – is hence asserted as less than evident, as open to doubt.'³³ Similarly, she wonders what is at work as Lacan accords the feminine and female sexuality the status of lack, and argues that women do not exist, not least of all because 'her sexual organ represents *the horror of nothing to see*.'³⁴

Irigaray demonstrates that the metaphysics of lack, atrophy, passivity, and absence are assigned to women and female sexuality at the points where Freud and Lacan's models of sexuality are unable to account for feminine subjectivity. Freud and Lacan both assume that models which work for male sexuality serve as a universal norm, and as a result, they read the inadequacies of their analysis when faced with female sexuality as symptomatic of women's nature. It is in this respect that psychoanalysis articulates a revelatory truth for Irigaray. In allocating female sexuality the status of lack, absence, darkness, Freud and Lacan inadvertently

³³ Luce Irigaray, *Speculum Of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, NY.: Cornell University Press, 1985), 23.

³⁴ Irigaray, *This Sex*, 26 Italics in original.

articulate the truth about the current status of women and the feminine in the Western cultural tradition:

Psychoanalytic discourse on female sexuality is the discourse of truth. A discourse that tells the truth about the logic of truth: namely, that *the feminine occurs only within models and laws devised by male subjects*. Which implies that there are not really two sexes, but only one. A single practice and representation of the sexual. With its history, its requirements, reverses, lacks, negative(s) . . . of which the female sex is the mainstay.³⁵

Freud and Lacan's modelling of sexuality and subjectivity thus make manifest the assumptions that support a phallically-constituted culture: that there is only one sex, one subject, and that is the masculine one. In other words, a phallic economy is grounded in the disavowal of the possibility of sexual difference.

In repeatedly allotting women and the feminine the status of a negative pole to a masculine positive, Freud and Lacan are in fact remaining within the terms provided by the very tradition they are analysing. By consistently understanding woman as man's Other, and thus reading the feminine as the binary opposite of the masculine, both psychoanalysts reduce the feminine to the 'non-masculine.' For Irigaray, this is symptomatic of both men's inability to recognise that their own investment in the culture they are describing impacts on their analysis. For designating woman as the dark continent does not shed any light on why and when that darkness fell across her, while identifying woman as lacking the phallus does not explain why there is not an imaginary ideal that could be considered as originating from her morphology. Irigaray indicts both men for their willingness to down analytic tools once they have sufficiently accounted for the current shape of things:

[A]s a result of using psychoanalysis (his psychoanalysis) only to scrutinize the history of his subject and his subjects, without interpreting *the historical determinants of the constitution of the "subject" as same*, [Freud] was restoring, yet again, the newly pressed down/repressed earth, upon which he stands erect, which for him, following tradition though in more explicit fashion, will be the body/sex of the mother/nature.³⁶

Although Irigaray is explicitly referring to Freud here, her critique implicates Lacan too. Thanks to their embeddedness in the culture they are describing, neither man scrutinises what allows them to designate the feminine as the negative term of a masculine subjectivity. In failing to analyse their own discourses, neither psychoanalyst recognises that their thinking rests on a fundamental appropriation of the feminine. The failure to interrogate the mechanisms that allow the Oedipal complex and primacy of the phallus mean that Freud and Lacan's theories, at

³⁵ Ibid., 86. Italics in original.

³⁶ Irigaray, *Speculum*, 140. Italics in original.

best, are descriptions of a Western tradition and at worst, make psychoanalysis a discourse that renders the current shape of things as somehow 'natural'. By ceasing their psychoanalysis before they have asked how the father and the phallus came to earn their primacy, Freud and Lacan re-inscribe the very forgetting of sexual difference that underpins the culture they are analysing. Hence, their psychoanalytic models of sexuality and subjectivity are based on a cessation of the psychoanalytic gesture.

It is important to note that it is the cessation that Irigaray is indicting, not psychoanalysis itself. Indeed, Irigaray reads the birth of psychoanalysis as the moment in which we had the chance to explore why it is that the culture and society we live in has taken its historical and contemporary forms and in doing so, bring about fundamental changes at all levels of our individual and cultural consciousness. This transformative potential makes psychoanalysis the cornerstone of all Irigaray's philosophical and political thought. For although Irigaray critiques Lacan's inability to see how his investment in a phallic culture impacts on his psychoanalytic approach, his concepts of the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real, and the complex relations between the three are the basis for the philosophical and ethical potential Irigaray sees in psychoanalysis. Thus, as Whitford illustrates, Irigaray shares Lacan's understanding of the symbolic as 'the order of discourse and meaning, the order into which all human beings have to insert themselves and which therefore precedes and exceeds individual subjectivity; it is what enables the subject to break out of the imaginary mother-child unity and become a social being.'³⁷ Crucially, Irigaray also accepts Lacan's reading of the imaginary as that which both underlies and is shaped by the symbolic or, as Whitford puts it, the 'imaginary is an *effect* of the symbolic; it is the symbolic which structures the imaginary, so there is a sense in which the imaginary does not exist until it is symbolized'.³⁸ This complex relationship and the manner in which this relation constitutes both our individual subjectivity and our culture as a whole contains the ethical potential of psychoanalytic thought for Irigaray. Again, Whitford helps summarise this deeply complex relation:

The question of the relation between symbolic/imaginary and subjectivity/identity can be formulated in this way: (1) subjectivity is a *structure*, or a position of enunciation. It is not identity; (2) but that structure would be empty without the imaginary: representations are what flesh it out. So the symbolic is structure (form) which is given content by the imaginary, and the imaginary pours itself into the available structures to form representations. Subjectivity, then, belongs to the symbolic, but it is empty without the imaginary; identity is imaginary, but it takes a symbolic (representational) form.³⁹

³⁷ Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* (London: Routledge, 1991), 90.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 91. Italics in original.

³⁹ *Ibid.* Italics in original.

By becoming conscious of the mechanisms and assumptions that underpin our symbolic, Irigaray suggests that we can then bring about conscious changes in that symbolic in order to facilitate a meaningful, ethical change in the imaginary that subtends our culture and our identities. In repeating the pre-established assumption that there can be only one symbolic order, that all subjects can be explained in terms of a single, universal model, Freud and Lacan overwrite psychoanalysis's potential to bring about change and instead reify the existing order.

For Irigaray then, '[s]exual difference is one of the major philosophical issues, if not the issue, of our age.'⁴⁰ Uncovering the ways in which psychoanalysis reveals the disavowal of sexual difference that structures our symbolic culture is more than just an analytic critique: it is the initial gesture necessary for us to bring about an ethical culture that does not appropriate the other(s). Irigaray's first move is to ask what Freud and Lacan have not: what has taken place to install the phallus and the father as the constitutive laws of our symbolic order? For psychoanalysis would suggest it is not enough to accept that this primacy is somehow natural. Indeed, Lacan himself stresses that in talking about the phallus, he is referring to an imaginary ideal, not a physical penis, as Grosz explains:

For Lacan, the phallus is not an organ or a symbol, but a *signifier*. The phallus is emblematic of language itself, a term which circulates and has value only within a system of other terms. The phallus is the term that divides the sexes into two oppositional categories; it is also the term governing relations between them. As a signifier, the phallus cannot be owned or possessed by anyone. No-one can appropriate a linguistic term, which functions only by virtue of the entire structure of language.⁴¹

Lacan argues that it is a mistake to locate the primacy of the phallus in the biology of the male body. According to Lacanian analysis, '[I]t is not the anatomy of the male body which seeks its own image in dominant discourse . . . men do not form discourse in their own image(s); rather, phallogocentric discourses form male sexuality in their image(s).'42 The primacy of the phallus can in no way be accounted for in terms of man's natural biological dominance; rather, it is because men have mistakenly identified their genitals with the phallus that male subjectivity has adapted to fit the demands of a phallic economy. Recognising that there is no innate, biological connection between the phallus and the male body is crucial for Irigaray's analysis of the disavowal of sexual difference. As Grosz neatly summarises, Irigaray builds on this Lacanian understanding that:

⁴⁰ Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (London; New York: Continuum, 2004), 7.

⁴¹ Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (Wellington; London; Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1989), 20.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 112.

This isomorphism, this correspondence of form or shape between phallogocentric representational systems and phallic male sexuality . . . is not a product of nature, anatomy, a male 'essence' or a neutral, transparent, reflective or 'objective' language. [Irigaray's] concepts of the body and corporeality refer only to a body that is structured, inscribed, constituted and given meaning *socially* and *historically* – a body that exists as such only through its socio-linguistic construction. She renders the concept of a 'pure' or 'natural' body meaningless. Power relations and systems of representation . . . actively constitute the body's very sensations, pleasures – the phenomenology of the body experience.⁴³

Irigaray's critique of the disavowal of sexual difference in the symbolic and her efforts to develop an ethics based on a cultivation of this repressed difference, are fundamentally informed by this Lacanian understanding of the connection between the body and the symbolic. Just as Lacan roots his analysis in the flesh-and-blood body only in so far as the penis serves as an object that the gaze internalises as the image-ideal in the imaginary, so too Irigaray's references to the body are never simply invoking a concept of the natural, anatomical body. The body in Irigaray's work is neither purely physical, nor entirely figurative. Rather, our experience of our materiality is inextricably bound up with our symbolic: as subjects '[w]e are . . . woven of bodies and words, beings and Beings'.⁴⁴ However, Irigaray differs from Lacan when she argues that rethinking our materiality can transform the symbolic. Specifically, she posits that recognising that there are at least two sexes, two different anatomies physically present in the world can bring about a change in our culture. Thus, Irigaray argues that her critical gesture differs from those who have gone before her, 'because I start from reality, from a universal reality: sexual difference.'⁴⁵

Why is it that a phallically-constituted symbolic order rests on a fundamental repression of sexual difference? And what are the consequences of such a disavowal? Irigaray answers these questions by returning to Greek myth to rethink Freud's use of the Oedipal story. For example, she reads *The Oresteia* and the figure of Antigone as emblematic of a stage in the development of our culture's imaginary. In her essay 'Body against Body: In Relation to the Mother',⁴⁶ Irigaray reads *The Oresteia* story as unfolding before the Oedipal myth. For her, Orestes sets up the *a priori* conditions necessary for Freud's claim that of the figure of Oedipus illustrates male sexual development and the little boy's submission to the law of the father. *The Oresteia*, Irigaray suggests, describes how the father was granted his power in the first

⁴³ Ibid., 111. Italics in original.

⁴⁴ Luce Irigaray, *Key Writings* (London; New York: Continuum, 2004), 21.

⁴⁵ Luce Irigaray, *Conversations* (London; New York: Continuum, 2008), 2.

⁴⁶ Luce Irigaray, 'Body Against Body: In Relation to the Mother', in *Sexes and Genealogies* (New York; Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1993), 7 – 22.

place. The myth recounts Agamemnon's return to his palace on Argos after the siege of Troy. Upon his return, Agamemnon's wife Clytemnestra murders him, motivated by revenge, jealousy, and fear. Inspired by the god Apollo, the couple's son Orestes plots with his sister, Electra, to murder Clytemnestra and thus avenge their father's death. After killing their mother, both siblings are driven mad as the Furies hound them for their violation of the maternal bond. However, when the Furies place Orestes on trial for his actions, Athena intervenes on his behalf, casting the decisive vote in favour of forgiving him. Athena absolves Orestes of his crime, and allows him to claim the seat of power that was once shared by Agamemnon and Clytemnestra. The Furies are also 'persuaded by Athena to give up their cause of fighting for the mother's right and become instead the Kindly Ones who will protect Athens and support Orestes' new reign.'⁴⁷ Electra, in Irigaray's reading, remains mad and powerless.

The Oresteia myth, for Irigaray, thus illustrates what has taken place in order that the patriarchal rule can be established:

Orestes kills his mother because the empire of the God-Father, who has seized and taken for his own the ancient powers . . . of the earth-mother, demands it. He kills his mother and is driven mad, as is his sister Electra.

Electra, the daughter will remain mad, The matricidal son, on the other hand, must be saved from madness so that he can found the patriarchal order. . .

Thus the murder of the mother is rewarded by letting the son go scot free, by burying the madness of women – and burying women in madness – and by introducing the image of the virgin goddess [Athena], born of the Father, obedient to his laws at the expense of the mother.⁴⁸

The patriarchal law that Freud's use of the Oedipal myth takes as a given is therefore founded by a commandeering of power by one sex, where two sexes used to reign. Orestes installs the power of patriarchy through the murder of his mother and the usurping of maternal authority in the guise of the motherless goddess Athena, while Electra's madness secures the forgetting of female genealogy. The law of the father is written in the blood of the murdered mother, and achieved by silencing the feminine. Hence, Irigaray asserts that our entire social order originates from the perpetration and forgetting of matricide: 'The substratum is the woman who reproduces social order, who is made this order's infrastructure: the whole of our western culture is based upon the murder of the mother'.⁴⁹ Thus, as Freud envisages civilisation emerging from the primal horde after the father's brutal death at the hands of his

⁴⁷ Amber Jacobs, 'Towards a Structural Theory of Matricide: Psychoanalysis, the Oresteia and the Maternal Prohibition', *Women: A Cultural Review* 15, no. 1 (2004): 24.

⁴⁸ Irigaray, 'Body Against Body', 12–13.

⁴⁹ Luce Irigaray, 'Women-Mothers, the Silent Substratum of the Social Order', in *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. Margaret Whitford, trans. David Macey (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 47.

sons in *Totem and Taboo*,⁵⁰ Irigaray asks if Freud is not ‘forgetting the woman who has been torn between son and father, among sons’,⁵¹ in order to bestow the dreaded father with his power in the first place. In assuming that the father-son relation serves as the foundational law of civilisation, Freud continues to replicate our cultural forgetting, for he does not recognise that fathers and sons could not exist at all without the maternal body. For Irigaray, Freud’s account of the Oedipal relation between child and mother is therefore ‘part of a postoeidipal phantasy projected backward onto the Oedipus phase’, a phantasy which re-enacts this foundational matricide as ‘the mother is cut up in stages,’ divided into a milk-giving breast, a faeces-receiving object, a constitutive gaze.⁵² Blinded to the possibility of sexual difference thanks to his own investment in a phallocratic culture, Freud continues to disavow the subject’s origins in the maternal body, using the mother’s body to sustain the phallic-masculine economy once again.

But why would patriarchal law or a phallic symbolic demand the disavowal of sexual difference? Why would such a symbolic require a matricidal gesture? In using *The Oresteia* to think back to a phantasmatic pre-phallocentric state in which two sexes exist, rule in tandem, and create life together, Irigaray locates the necessity of the repression of difference as emanating from phallically-constructed ideals. As the ideal of the tumescent penis, the phallus above all privileges the singular, the discrete, the individual, the complete. The reality of sexual difference – that there are at least two sexes present in this world – poses a threat to this phallic phantasy of completed singularity. Moreover, not only does the fact that each subject is physically created thanks to this difference render phallic ideals of oneness insecure, it implicates the phallus in the production of ‘otherness’, in the creation of a ‘different’ sex, a generation of difference that calls into question the unity and singularity of that which creates it. Most importantly, our origins in the maternal body challenge the phallic phantasy of singularity. Not only does the umbilical connection to the mother suggest that such singularity is impossible for us as human subjects, this very connection provides us with a sensation of completeness *in utero* that the phallus can never achieve:

During that time in her womb, then, haven of skin, of membranes, of water – a complete world, in fact, in which and through he receives all he wants, with no need for work or clothing – air, warmth, food, blood, life, potentially even the risk of death,

⁵⁰ Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo and Other Works*, ed. James Strachey and Anna Freud, vol. XIII, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud (London: Vintage, 2001), 142–144.

⁵¹ Irigaray, ‘Body Against Body’, 13.

⁵² Ibid.

come to him via a hollow thread. Everything comes that route, without being called upon.⁵³

The womb is the first world we inhabit, while our umbilical connection to our mother's body is the original formative relation, the nourishing interaction between two bodies, mediated by the placenta, that allows us to grow into subjects. The mother's body is that which brings 'us *whole* into the world,'⁵⁴ allows us to develop into individual subjects who can then enter the outside world. The memory or nostalgia for this maternal relation haunts the phallic, representing a completeness it can never replicate, as well as demonstrating that such completeness stems from a relation 'between two' rather than self-sufficient unity. Finally, the maternal body frustrates the visibility that underwrites the phallus' very existence as an ideal. As the Lacanian modelling of the mirror-stage illustrates, it is the visibility of the penis that establishes the phallus as an imaginary ideal, and as such, vision and the visible become its primary sensorial mode. Hence, as Irigaray puts it, '[b]ecause the power of semen isn't immediately obvious in procreation, it's relayed by the linguistic code, the *logos*. Which want to become the all-embracing truth.'⁵⁵ The maternal body conceals procreation from the gaze of the phallic eye, generating an anxiety that must be assuaged for the phallic to uphold its integrity.

Haunted by a nostalgia for *in uterine* completeness, rendered blind by the maternal body's physicality, and threatened by the presence of difference, the phallus resorts to matricide to maintain its own ideals. As emblematic of the initial moment in which a culture of difference was overturned in favour of a patriarchal order, Irigaray argues that *The Oresteia* enables us to rethink the status psychoanalysis accords to the phallus as relying on a similar coup:

The genital drive is theoretically that drive by which the phallic penis captures the mother's power to give birth, nourish, inhabit, center. Doesn't the phallic erection occur at the place where the umbilical cord once was? The phallus becomes the organiser of the world through the man-father at the very place where the umbilical cord, that primal link to the mother, once gave birth to man and woman.⁵⁶

Just as Orestes' matricide brings about the beginnings of a new, singular, masculine reign, so too the phallus eschews the original umbilical relation to the mother and claims for itself the

⁵³ Luce Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (New York; Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1993), 32.

⁵⁴ Irigaray, 'Body Against Body', 13.

⁵⁵ Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous: Toward a Culture of Difference*, trans. Alison Martin (London; New York: Routledge Classics, 2007), 62 Italics in original.

⁵⁶ Irigaray, 'Body Against Body', 15.

primary constitutional relation. The phallic economy prohibits any acknowledgement of our first experiences within the maternal world to ensure the coherence of its symbolic:

The ban upon returning, regressing to the womb, as well as to the language and dreams shared with the mother, this is indeed the point, the line, the surface upon which the “subject” will continue to stand, to advance, to unfold his discourse, even to make it whirl.⁵⁷

At the very point where feminine sexual difference becomes essential for the continuation of life, where the recognition of female specificity seems unavoidable, the phallic economy shuts down that possibility, anointing itself with the power of creation that properly belongs to the womb and the placental relation, to become the master of its own origins. As a consequence, in a phallic economy, ‘[t]he womb is never thought of as the primal place in which we become body,’⁵⁸ as Irigaray demonstrates in her extensive analysis of European philosophical traditions. Instead, the maternal role in the creation of the subject is reduced to that of a workman-like womb, as it ‘reproduces’ matter to be moulded into subjects by a phallic symbolic:

[B]y man’s “active” role in intercourse and by the fact that he will mark the product of copulation with *his own name*. . . woman, whose intervention in the work of engendering the child can hardly be questioned, becomes the anonymous worker, the machine in the service of a master-proprietor who will put his trademark upon the finished product. . . . the desire that men [*sic*] here displays [is] to determine for himself what is constituted by “origin,” and thereby eternally and ever to reproduce him (as) self . . .⁵⁹

As Irigaray’s use of the term ‘matricide’ suggests, it is in the phallus’s appropriation of the umbilical relation to the mother in order to secure its own logic that we find the terroristic gesture that lies at the heart of our culture.

Irigaray argues that the phallus is so dependent on the repression of the maternal for its authority that its symbolic never breaks off its original umbilical relation to the mother, as the phallus continues to rely on the maternal body for its grounding and nourishment. This continued attachment means that a phallic symbolic must not only prohibit any acknowledgement of its origins in the flesh and blood of the mother, it has to foreclose the possibility of a feminine symbolic altogether. For if the feminine could speak, could cultivate a symbolic that followed the morphology of a female body, it could potentially speak of this initial relation. A feminine symbolic would arguably reclaim the umbilical relation as its own and recall the significance of the uterus in the creation of subjectivity. Thus, to make sure that

⁵⁷ Irigaray, *Speculum*, 140.

⁵⁸ Irigaray, ‘Body Against Body’, 16.

⁵⁹ Irigaray, *Speculum*, 23. Italics in original.

'the body that gives life never enters into language',⁶⁰ a phallic symbolic must work to deny the possibility of a symbolic based on a female morphology before it is even thought. As such, from the beginnings of a phallic culture:

The *one* of form, of the individual, of the (male) sexual organ, of the proper name, of the proper meaning . . . supplants, while separating and dividing, that contact of *at least two* (lips) which keeps woman in touch with herself, but without any possibility of distinguishing what is touching from what is touched.⁶¹

Not only would a feminine symbolic speak of something that is beyond the phallic binary of 'one' and 'not-one', testifying to a difference that cannot be reduced to the logic of a phallic symbolic, it would also remind us of what Irigaray describes as our culture's 'debt' to the maternal.

The recognition that a symbolic based on a feminine morphology is denied in a phallogocentric culture forms the basis of what are widely characterised as Irigaray's feminist interventions. Without a symbolic appropriate to their bodies, Irigaray posits, women are left in a state of 'dereliction', unable to cultivate a system of expression in their own terms. It is in this sense that women are absent in phallic economy. We shall return to the implications of this position in due course but for now, as we move into a discussion of how Irigaray's critique of a phallic economy impacts on our understanding of terrorism, it is important to examine how the repression of the maternal and the silencing of the feminine shape our culture's relation to the material world. For Irigaray, this relation is inextricably bound up with the status of women:

Subjectivity denied to woman: indisputably this provides the financial backing for every irreducible constitution as an object: of representation, of discourse, of desire. Once imagine that woman imagines and the object loses its fixed, obsessional character. As a bench mark that is ultimately more crucial than the subject, for he can sustain himself only by bouncing back off some objectiveness, some objective. If there is no more "earth" to press down/repress, to work, to represent, but also and always desire (for one's own) then what pedestal remains for the ex-sistence of the "subject"?⁶²

Irigaray's association of the feminine with 'earth' here, and elsewhere, with 'nature' and 'ground' is not a mere regurgitation of stereotypes. Rather, it is a description of the position the feminine and women are allotted without the possibility of their own symbolic. Unable to generate a culture appropriate to themselves, women are left in a state of immanence, trapped in the material world, undifferentiated from nature. This involuntary immanence is

⁶⁰ Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, 46.

⁶¹ Irigaray, *This Sex*, 26. Italics in original.

⁶² Irigaray, *Speculum*, 133.

precisely that which allows the phallic-masculine to elevate itself above nature, distancing itself from its material roots and striving for a transcendence that fits phallic-informed values of hierarchy. In disavowing its beginnings in the womb, the phallic subject has alienated itself from the material world and therefore must look to the transcendental for its origins, using language to carve out a 'home' in the world. In this sense, Irigaray argues that by continuing to use the feminine as its material grounding, the phallus not only silences the feminine, but cuts the masculine from its own materiality. The masculine has, in effect, lost touch with its own body, its own specificity, and reduced its sexuality to coincide with the monolithic phallus. As Gallop highlights, 'phallographic logic determines a certain unitary perception of male genitalia'⁶³, as even the testicles are excluded in the image of the phallus. For Irigaray, then, the masculine body is muted in a phallic overwriting of difference:

So long as men claim to say everything and define everything, how can anyone know what the language of the male sex might be? So long as the logic of discourse is modelled on sexual indifference, on the submission of one sex to the other, how can anything be known about the "masculine"?⁶⁴

A phallic economy, then, does not simply forget the maternal body: its appropriation of the umbilical relation engenders a forgetting of materiality altogether.

The disavowal of sexual difference that underwrites a phallic symbolic thus renders the material world subordinate to its own order. In forgetting our own bodies, we simultaneously fail to acknowledge the material world of which they are part. As such, Irigaray argues

[T]he world is designated as inanimate abstractions integral to the subject's world. Reality appears as an always already cultural reality, linked to the individual and collective history of the masculine subject. It's always a matter of secondary nature, cut off from its corporeal roots, its cosmic environment, its relation to life.⁶⁵

By making use of the maternal body to secure its economy, the phallus ultimately configures our relation to the material world in a similar vein: the world becomes useful to us, secondary to our ideals and there to support our culture rather than shape it. For Irigaray, this amounts to an absolute cut between life and culture, a division that is inherently terroristic as it allows us to use each other and the world by respecting cultural ideals rather than life itself:

In a way, all of our Western patriarchal system amounts to this: killing without openly committing murder; that is to say, little by little depriving us of the surroundings that allow us to live, by polluting, annihilating the equilibrium of the environment, destroying the plant and animal worlds, and finally humanity itself.⁶⁶

⁶³ Jane Gallop, *Thinking Through the Body* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 98.

⁶⁴ Irigaray, *This Sex*, 128.

⁶⁵ Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous*, 28.

⁶⁶ Luce Irigaray, 'Between Myth and History: The Tragedy of Antigone', in *Interrogating Antigone in Postmodern Philosophy and Criticism*, ed. S.E. Wilmer and Audronė Žukauskaitė (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 204.

This is the terrorism Irigaray locates as innate to a phallically-constituted culture. The material world and all the lives in it are figured as 'useful' to the symbolic; life and physicality become pliant, subordinate, and secondary to culture's abstract values, permitting an unceasing appropriation of life in the name of those ideals. In a very real sense, denying sexual difference leads to a culture reliant on the violent disavowal of life.

Reading Terrorism with Irigaray

The symbolic order's fundamental denial of our material-maternal origins is the violence that Irigaray identifies as lying at the root of Western cultural traditions. Yet if this violence is inherent in the particular formation of a symbolic order, a phallically-informed tradition, how are we to interpret her claim that we are living in a time of exhibition, a moment in which this symbolic violence is being openly expressed? Does this mean that terrorist violence is rooted in this cut between culture and life? This seems counterintuitive, as terrorism is generally understood as attacking an established order, as coming from a point beyond the system. Similarly, Irigaray has focused her critique of a phallic tradition on Western thought and philosophy and has never asserted that it applies directly to other patriarchal cultures. Hence, we cannot simply assume that violence conducted in the name of Islamic fundamentalism, for instance, can be characterised as such an expression. Exhibition, then, does not necessarily refer to the symbolic's violent subordination of life translating directly into physical terrorist violence. Rather, we need to look to how this cut between the material and the symbolic manifests itself in our own contemporary moment in order to comprehend how this expression of innate violence impacts on our lives and translates into a perpetuation of lethal aggression.

Can we not read the concept of terrorism itself as such a manifestation? Physical violence is not alien to our culture, and we have legal frameworks that are deemed sufficient to address the abuses that take place every day within our society. But when faced with violence that is labelled as 'terrorist', these same frameworks are adjusted, altered, suspended; they are somehow inadequate to the task. Similarly, why is it that certain acts of violence are read as terrorist, while others are defined as 'war' or 'murder'? These questions are frequently dealt with in terrorism discourses, but always in terms of a legitimacy accorded by existing political or moral systems. It is only in rare instances, in works such as Zulaika and Douglass's *Terror and Taboo: the Fables, Follies and Faces of Terrorism*, that the need to

categorise something as “terrorist” comes under scrutiny.⁶⁷ But this widespread acceptance that established legal institutions are unable to respond to violence rendered as terrorist should alert us to the fact that when we invoke this term, we do so because we wish to make such violence excessive, to place it beyond the bounds of our cultural system. While illegal behaviour is accommodated within the system by the very act of recognising it as illegal, terrorism becomes ‘excessively’ illegal, a murder worse than murder. As Sinclair asserts, there is system-wide understanding that ‘[t]error is murder on the cheap.’⁶⁸

But what is it that stirs this desire to mark terrorist aggression as excessive, as somehow “illegitimate” illegitimate violence? The answer lies in the recognition that terrorism has symbolic effects. Gearty tells us that the ‘genuine political terrorist differs from the criminal because of his or her motive. The purpose is not personal gain, but political advantage.’⁶⁹ Martin distinguishes terrorism from murder, as its roots in extremist thought mean it becomes ‘a radical expression of one’s political values.’⁷⁰ Even as Clutterbuck asserts that terrorism should be dealt with as a criminal offence, he identifies it as exceptional murder, ‘killing without due process of law in order to terrorise the rest of the population into complying with the wishes of the killer.’⁷¹ What makes terrorist violence exceptional, excessive, then, is the perception that the perpetrators want to bring about a change in the symbolic structures that shape our societies. If Irigaray tells us that our current symbolic tradition rests on a fundamental disavowal of our maternal-material beginnings, and violence is delineated as terrorist when it has symbolic aspirations, can we not surmise that the actions and behaviours that our culture label as “terrorist” are those which deliberately confront the symbolic order with the repressed materiality that subtends it? Could terrorism be that which threatens a symbolic culture and its subjects by invoking the flesh and blood that they have forgotten to allow their symbolic to unfold?

The concept of terrorism emerges at the point at which is it desirable to place physical violence beyond the remit of the established legal framework, precisely because it is recognised as violence designed to destabilise the prevailing symbolic structure. In essence, the aggressive action we identify as terrorist within our culture is presumed to work because the symbolic is inextricably connected to the material world. But the disavowal of this connection is so central to our social and subjective constitution that we must situate acts

⁶⁷ Zulaika and Douglass, *Terror and Taboo*.

⁶⁸ Andrew Sinclair, *An Anatomy of Terror: a History of Terrorism* (London: Pan, 2004), xv.

⁶⁹ Conor Gearty, *Terror* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), 8.

⁷⁰ Gus Martin, *Understanding Terrorism: Challenges, Perspectives, and Issues* (Thousand Oaks; London: SAGE, 2003), 6.

⁷¹ Richard Clutterbuck, *Terrorism in an Unstable World* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), 5.

which make explicit use of this umbilical attachment as exterior to the systems that shape and govern us. Legal recognition of actions that deliberately use the physical world to engender symbolic consequences would risk bringing the umbilical relation into the very institutional frameworks that enforce the symbolic's will. The concept of terrorist action thus becomes a means of maintaining the symbolic's integrity, conserving its legitimacy even as it is brutally confronted with the reality of the materiality that subtends its logic. Invoking the idea of terrorism serves to render us blind once again to the fleshy underbelly of our culture, pushing the connection between the symbolic and the material to the margins, and leaving us instead with an awareness that terrorist action has symbolic intent and effects, but unable to speak of how one translates into the other. I argue, therefore, that Irigaray's modelling of the umbilical relation of the symbolic to the maternal-material opens up the prospect that it is the concept of terrorism itself that we need to understand as the manifestation of the violence internal to our own culture. It is in the very idea of terrorism that our symbolic economy exhibits the aggression at its core.

An Irigarayan approach means that we need to be conscious of terrorism as a cultural construct, as a phenomenon that emerges at a particular point in our own thinking. For although the symbolic attempts to disavow our maternal-material origins, it can never rid us of our flesh and overcome the materiality of the world around us. The material remains an ever present threat, poised to make its presence known, to erupt unexpectedly and disrupt the coherence of the symbolic, as Irigaray makes apparent as she describes the immanence of the feminine:

If the earth turned and more especially turned upon herself, the erection of the subject might thereby be disconcerted and risk losing its elevation and penetration. For what would there be to rise up from and exercise his power over? And in?⁷²

This means moving past the commonplace recognition that terrorism is always fundamentally a matter of 'perspective', of realising that 'one person's terrorist is another person's freedom fighter'⁷³ and that each political system will define terrorism in accordance with its own legislative norms. Instead, an Irigarayan reading insists that we locate the concept itself within our cultural matrices and understand it as laden with cultural meaning beyond the political and sociological significance that society overtly accords it. Hence, we need to understand the concept of terrorism and the discourses that surround it as forming a cultural response to a particular formation of violence.

⁷² Irigaray, *Speculum*, 133.

⁷³ Martin, *Understanding Terrorism*, 9.

Refiguring terrorism as a concept that comes into play when the symbolic is confronted by its fleshy roots suggests that terrorism discourses are in a paradoxical position, as the logic and language of the symbolic attempts to deal with the resurgence of its material origins, a resurgence that was brought about specifically to damage or destroy that order. Yet, if there is a fundamental link between the symbolic and the material as Irigaray suggests, surely such a violent and explosive encounter with the material will leave its scars within the symbolic, scars that no amount of assertion can entirely conceal? As the study of such encounters, perhaps nowhere will these scars be revealed as readily as in terrorism studies. Operating under the rubric of social science, these texts have the task of studying, explaining, and defining a violent phenomenon that threatens to undermine the very symbolic system which facilitates their existence. Read in this light, terrorism studies is a discursive practice that has to simultaneously apply its analysis to an object of study and assert the validity of the system which is producing the study. To put it another way, these texts work to reduce the threatening moment of a re-emergent materiality to symbolic terms, re-inscribing the authority of the symbolic and re-enacting the repression of the material once again. Therefore, in exploring the ways in which terrorism studies bears the hallmarks of a symbolic struggle against a resurgent material, we can begin to unearth the cultural assumptions that ground the concept of terrorism itself.

Moreover, unveiling the silent substratum that supports this discipline allows us to assess the extent to which the alternative discourses present within our culture are able to enact an ethical interruption of the dominant epistemology of terrorism. Irigaray echoes the implicit assumption that different discourses occupy contrasting positions within a culture that underlies Spivak's methodology. Indeed, the ethical potential Irigaray perceives in psychoanalysis relies on the recognition that symbolic terms are inflected with meanings specific to a subject's own relation to the world and culture. If discourses prevalent in a culture adhere to phallic ideals, the same is not necessarily true of those that do not claim centre stage. As we have seen, Irigaray asserts that changes in the symbolic can bring about deep-rooted change, and as such:

The beginnings – the real foundations? – of a culture are poetic, or at least artistic . . . Whether we really are at the dawn of a new culture, or rather in an important cultural transition, art has a role to play in seeing us through this time. For Hegel, war is useful at such points. I prefer to have recourse to art as a way of initiating possible beginnings, having before interpreted myths from the past.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ 'Preface' Luce Irigaray, *Prières Quotidiennes: Everyday Prayers*, trans. Luce Irigaray and Tim Mathews (Paris; Nottingham: Mazonneuve & Larose; University of Nottingham, 2004), 29.

The poetic, the artistic, play with the strings that tie the signifier to signified and in doing, loosen the symbolic's umbilical attachment to the world in a way that creates the possibility of finding an alternative foundation for our culture. Just as the myths of Ancient Greece allowed Irigaray to open up the ethical possibilities hidden in Freud and Lacan's psychoanalysis, perhaps it is in the more poetic discourses on terrorism that we will find the beginnings of an ethical response? Can our philosophical and literary figurings of terrorism enact an ethical interruption thanks to their willingness to play with the stability of the signifier? Before we can answer this question, we must first map out the muted terrain that supports the concept of terrorism, so that we can detect where the dominant and the alternative share common ground. Only then can we ascertain whether or not we are capable of formulating an ethical response to such violence in our current cultural tradition.

The Taxonomy of Terrorism

The discipline which is currently formalising itself as 'Terrorism Studies' within the academy has its roots in decades of literature on terrorism, literature that varies greatly in terms of the quality of the writing, the intellectual contribution, and most significantly, in the rigour of the research. Though the surge in concern with terrorism over the past two decades has brought about an increase in funding for academic research into terrorist behaviour and counter-terrorist strategies from both governmental and industry sources, particularly since 2001,⁷⁵ Terrorism Studies is nonetheless grounded in the vast body of material that precedes these moves towards academic formalisation. The kinds of texts and studies that are now recognised as constituting Terrorism Studies began to appear with increasing regularity from the early 1960s onwards. Prior to this, in English at least, much of the writing on terrorism was either produced by official sources (government departments, intelligence agencies, etc.) or by those advocating the use of violence in the name of a cause.⁷⁶ This changed when the present-day model of Terrorism Studies began to emerge, as amateur analysts through to academics from a variety of disciplines began to produce studies of terrorist activity. This apparent openness to all levels of qualification continues today, with the work of influential academics such as Professor Walter Laqueur and Professor Paul Wilkinson, whose careers have been built on their analysis of terrorism, appearing alongside one-off contributions from writers such as

⁷⁵ See Silke's overview of the changing shape of 'Terrorism Studies' from the 1960s to the present day in his introduction to Silke, *Research on Terrorism* See in particular pp 15-26.

⁷⁶ See for example Committee for the International Repression of Terrorism (LEAGUE OF NATIONS), *Report to the Council Adopted by the Committee on January 15th, 1936 (on April 26th, 1937)* (Geneva: League of Nations, January 15, 1936); and Leon Trotsky, *The Defence of Terrorism (Terrorism and Communism): A Reply to Karl Kautsky* (London: Labour Publishing Co., 1921).

Andrew Sinclair and Michael Kronenwetter.⁷⁷ Despite this broad sweep of contributors and the comparatively recent beginnings of an established discipline, the works that make up Terrorism Studies display a remarkable level of consistency, so much so that they form a recognisable discursive practice. That this practice pre-dates the formal discipline immediately suggests that it is specifically a form of cultural expression, a discourse shaped by unarticulated cultural boundaries and imperatives, as opposed to a discourse moulded by the methodological demands of a science. Yet, from the outset, terrorism studies have modelled themselves as social science studies. Whether they take the form of a straightforward history of terrorism, or combine a mixture of historical background and data analysis, the language and style adopted by these texts invokes the authority of a social scientific approach, albeit with varying degrees of success and legitimacy, as we shall see.

From the earliest studies of terrorism, such as Laqueur's *Terrorism*,⁷⁸ to present-day investigations such as Jackson et al.'s *Terrorism: A Critical Introduction*,⁷⁹ it is convention for each such work, be it amateur or academic, to dedicate an introductory paragraph or chapter to acknowledging and outlining the problems involved in defining what terrorism is, before embarking on a paper- or book-length attempt to do just that. Similarly, the analytical categories used for constructing these definitions and conducting the investigations are consistent across time and authorial background. Typically, these studies include an attempt to distinguish State or guerrilla violence from terrorist activity, detailed discussions of the type of violence used and the professed aims of those perpetrating the violence, the socio-economic context surrounding the perpetrators, the psychology and psychological make-up of the terrorist, and the role the media plays in disseminating the terrorist's message.⁸⁰ Finally, each investigation invariably concludes with a speculative chapter in which they address future forms of terrorism, and potential programmes for effective counter-terrorism.

⁷⁷ During his long academic career, Laqueur was Chairman of the International Research Council of the Center for Strategic and International Studies until 2000, and held visiting professorships at Harvard, Chicago, Tel Aviv and John Hopkins universities. Wilkinson, one of the U.K.'s foremost terrorism experts, was the first Professor of International Relations at the University of Aberdeen and set up the International Relations department at St. Andrews, as well as being Director of the Research Institute for Study of Conflict and Terrorism. Sinclair is a novelist and film-maker with a wide-ranging interest in history, whilst Kronenwetter writes novels for young adults and reference books on history, politics, journalism and terrorism.

⁷⁸ Walter Laqueur, *Terrorism* (London: Abacus, 1978).

⁷⁹ Richard Jackson et al., *Terrorism: A Critical Introduction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

⁸⁰ See for example Whittaker, *Terrorism Reader*; Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York; Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2006); Martha Crenshaw, ed., *Terrorism in Context* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995); W. A. Tupman, *Towards a Typology of Terrorism: Criticisms and Definitions in the Field of Political Violence* (Brookfield Press, 1989); Paul Wilkinson, *Terrorism Versus Democracy: The Liberal State Response* (London: Routledge, 2011), to mention but a few.

Essentially, these texts are concerned with the mechanics of terrorism, both with the events themselves and with the workings of the terrorist mind, forming what Zulaika and Douglass have described as a 'taxonomy' of terrorism.⁸¹ This taxonomy is now so firmly entrenched that very few question its appropriateness for shaping the epistemological approach of the newly-minted discipline of Terrorism Studies, or its suitability as a framework for broader discourses, including global policy-making regarding terrorism. As Terrorism Studies solidifies into a set of modules, bibliographies and canonical texts, textbooks such as Martin's *Essentials of Terrorism* demonstrate how pervasive this taxonomy is, providing students with maps of terrorist 'habitats', graphs illustrating the frequency of different types of terror attack, tables comparing motivation with style of violence, and photographs of both the terrorist and the consequences of their actions.⁸² Texts such as this graphically illustrate the appropriateness of Zulaika and Douglass's choice of the term 'taxonomy', as it carries specific biological connotations. For all Martin's conventional acknowledgement of the difficulties of defining terror, the combination of illustrations, geographical information and presentation of data leave little room for doubt about the object of study: the terrorist animal. The taxonomy of terrorism thus works to construct a distinct epistemological object.

Yet for all the plausibility of these textbooks, guides, histories and studies, there is no escaping the fact that terrorism studies are unable to define their remit. Silke and White both draw a telling parallel with attempts to legally define pornography, with the approach in both cases being 'while I might not be able to define it for you, I still know it when I see it.'⁸³ Such an approach lays bare the epistemological assumption that supports terrorism discourses as a whole: that it is possible to know what terrorism is by seeing it. Terrorism studies rely absolutely on this presumption, always working to establish what they know about the terrorist object, despite being unable to identify it as a discrete entity until it has appeared before them. This inability to define squarely the scope of one's study is not inherently problematic. Many disciplines would struggle to produce such a definition, and indeed it is the nature of good research that its scope is not unduly restrained. It becomes problematic for terrorism studies, however, precisely because it has grounded its epistemological framework in the terrorist object itself.

The taxonomy of terrorism studies thus operates in a similar manner to Hayden White's narrative histories. White argues that historical narratives achieve their authority by

⁸¹ Zulaika and Douglass, *Terror and Taboo*, 101.

⁸² Gus Martin, *Essentials of Terrorism: Concepts and Controversies* (London: SAGE, 2008).

⁸³ Silke, *Research on Terrorism*, 3.; Interestingly, White is citing the U.S. Supreme Court's definition of what constitutes pornography. Jonathan R. White, *Terrorism: An Introduction 2002 Update* (Belmont; Melbourne; Toronto; London: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2002), 4.

creating a sense that the narrative is 'found' within the events being narrated, rather than being constructed by the historian.⁸⁴ The historian effaces their agency as an interpreter of historical fact in favour of generating the impression that the facts themselves are producing the narrative. In doing so, the historian's narrative achieves an authoritative sense of 'fullness,' a sense that all the relevant data has been consulted and included, and that the narrative that emerges accurately describes the causal links between factors.⁸⁵ Arising out of the 'mechanics' of terrorism, the current epistemology of terrorism appears to have been 'found', to be innate to terrorism itself, and thus studies informed by such a methodology appear to be addressing the subject comprehensively and authoritatively.

This is not to argue that such categories should be dismissed as inherently unhelpful or misguided. Rather, it is to draw attention to the epistemological loop that underwrites the approach of terrorism studies. The taxonomy of terrorism is simultaneously grounded in the terrorist object, and used to define that object. This rhetorical circuit should alert us to the fact that our understanding of terrorism is deeply embedded in cultural assumptions, rather than in scientific observation. Yet arguably it is because this circuit is cloaked in the language of scientific investigation that we fail to detect its problematic nature. Tellingly, one of the rare occasions that Irigaray explicitly refers to terrorism occurs as she contemplates presenting her analysis of the linguistic practices of scientific disciplines to a room full of scientists:

Anxiety in the face of an absolute power that hovers in the air, in the face of judgement by an imperceptible but ever present authority, in the face of a tribunal without judge, lawyer or defendant! The judicial system is in place nonetheless. There is a truth to which one must submit without appeal, against which one can unintentionally and unknowingly transgress. This high court is in session against your will. No one is responsible for this terror, or this terrorism. Nevertheless, they are in operation. In this very classroom or conference hall. For me, in any case.⁸⁶

The parallels Irigaray draws here are unmistakable. References to an anonymous, absolute power, a tribunal devoid of legal representatives, a truth against which there is no appeal, and yet which is easily transgressed, all deliberately recall the Revolutionary Tribunal, the legal instrument that facilitated the Reign of Terror in the bloodiest days of the French Revolution. Thus, in this striking passage, Irigaray associates scientific logic with the historical moment that

⁸⁴ Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore; London: John Hopkins University Press, 1987).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 20–22.

⁸⁶ Luce Irigaray, 'In Science, Is The Subject Sexed?', in *To Speak Is Never Neutral* (London; New York: Continuum, 2002), 248.

gave birth to the term 'terrorism'.⁸⁷ But why would she draw such an extreme parallel? For Irigaray, contemporary scientific methodologies and discourses are the epitome of phallic symbolic thought:

Scientists now claim to be standing *before the world*: naming it, establishing its laws, axiomatizing it. They manipulate nature, use it, exploit it, but forget that they are also *in* it, that they are still physical, and not simply confronting phenomena whose physical nature they sometimes fail to recognize.⁸⁸

Science, as it is presently constituted by our culture, deliberately enacts an appropriation of the material world to secure its abstract logic, replicating the foundational gesture of our symbolic. To locate oneself in a scientific discipline, then, is to assume this position of epistemological authority, to position oneself before the world in order to describe it. The hermetic seal between object and epistemology that supports terrorism studies logic and claims to authority thus may not be representative of scientific praxis, but it does replicate the scientific gesture: applying a name and an epistemology in order to shape the world.

To a certain degree, cultural assumptions about the objectivity of the scientist also work to maintain the prestige of terrorism discourses in spite of this epistemological loop. We accord the scientist the ability to stand both outside of culture and their own bodies. The notion of objectivity 'shelters [science and scientists] from all instability, all moods, all feelings and effective fluctuations, all intuitions not readily programmed in the name of science, all interference from their desires, notably sexual ones, that could affect discoveries'.⁸⁹ Objectivity works to mask the human presence of the scientist within their discourses, by forgetting their bodily existence. However, this is not the case for all scientific approaches, as Irigaray acknowledges:

In the language of science there is no *I*, no *you*, no *we*. The subjective is prohibited, except in the more or less secondary sciences, the human sciences, and we cannot seem to decide whether they are indeed sciences, or substitutes for science, or literature, or poetry? . . . Or even whether are they true or false, able to be proved or disproved, formalizable or always ambiguous because expressed in natural languages, too empirical or too metaphysical, dependent on the axiomatization of the so-called exact sciences or resistant to such formalization, etc?⁹⁰

Terrorism studies resemble social science in so far as their methodology does not demand the absolute disavowal of the subjective presence. One does not have to go far to find the

⁸⁷ Edmund Burke is acknowledged as coining the term 'terrorism' to describe the Reign of Terror that characterized the French Revolution between June 1793 to July 1794. See for example Martin, *Understanding Terrorism*, 5.

⁸⁸ Irigaray, 'In Science', 254. Italics in original.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 254.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 247. Italics in original.

subjective making itself felt in such investigations. Kronenwetter opens his guide by informing his readers that 'One thing we know for sure: terrorism is wrong . . . The difficulty is not finding a way to define what terrorism is; it is finding a way to define what isn't. At least, by implication. We must be careful to leave our own actions out of it.'⁹¹ Burleigh goes one stage further, defining the limits of his research through his own ability to recollect the facts: '[w]e could venture back to the medieval Assassins of Syria or the early modern British Gunpowder Plot, but my knowledge of both has faded with age and I do not regard either as especially helpful in understanding contemporary terrorism.'⁹² The subjective presence of the author reaches its height as research asks if 'terrorists' methods are inherently evil?'⁹³ For contributors to the field such as Ledeen, the answer is clear:

We think all people everywhere are fundamentally the same and, having turned the study of history into a hymn to the wonders of multiculturalism, we are reluctant to accept Machiavelli's dictum that man is more inclined to do evil than to do good. Throughout this generation of political correctness, it has been singularly bad form for anyone in America to suggest that there are some truly evil people, and even some thoroughly evil regimes, whose fear and hatred of us are so intractable that "live and let live" (our mind set) will not do. It has to be "kill or be killed."⁹⁴

Such overt personal and political expressions should serve to undermine the claims of terrorism studies to scientific integrity, and yet this is not the case. Terrorism research is not read as being akin to literary or poetic discourses, despite the its patently subjective nature. Rather, it is insistent on its authority as a scientific discourse.

In their anthropological analysis of terrorism discourses, Zulaika and Douglass argue that scientific validity of this subjective approach is rooted in the concept of terrorism itself. By tracing the terrorist's genealogy back through figures such as the witch and the savage, Zulaika and Douglass demonstrate that just like its predecessors, the figure of the terrorist carries with it a set of taboos which inevitably shape the discourses around it. Blending a Freudian understanding of how taboo operates within a culture with the work of anthropologists such

⁹¹ Michael Kronenwetter, *Terrorism: a Guide to Events and Documents* (Westport, CT.; London: Greenwood Press, 2004), 4. Out of context, this quote acquires an ironic tone, but the context makes apparent that it is meant in earnest.

⁹² Michael Burleigh, *Blood and Rage: A Cultural History of Terrorism* (London; New York: Harper Perennial, 2008), xiii. Burleigh has had an illustrious academic career, holding Professorships within the U.K. and the U.S. He continues to sit on the Academic Advisory Board for the Institut für Zeitgeschichte in Munich and is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society in the U.K. (See www.michaelburleigh.com). He later turned his back on academia because he objected to the institutional apparatus and the internal politics. (See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2008/mar/11/academicexperts.highereducationprofile>) Both accessed 13 January 2012.

⁹³ Martin, *Understanding Terrorism*, 9.

⁹⁴ Michael A. Ledeen, *The War Against the Terror Masters: Why It Happened: Where We Are Now: How We'll Win* (New York: Truman Talley, 2002), xvii.

as Michael Taussig, Mary Douglass, Bruce Lincoln and in particular, Franz Steiner, their critique characterises the terrorist as the latest in an ancient family of excluded figures, figures which serve as a repository for the 'shortcomings, contradictions, and arbitrariness' of particular social structures, that then carry these potentially destructive elements to a point outside of those structures.⁹⁵ They draw parallels between terrorism discourses and attempts by anthropologists in the early twentieth century to read cultures through totemism, as well as the Inquisition's Europe-wide witch-hunt in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the first instance, anthropologists made concerted efforts to apply the epistemological model of totemism to cultures, regardless of the evidence their observations set before them.⁹⁶ In the second instance, Zulaika and Douglass show that the ontology of witchcraft relied almost entirely on the epistemological models developed by the Inquisitors themselves.⁹⁷ Terrorism discourses mirror these historical examples in that they perform a conceptual reification, what Zulaika and Douglass describe as 'an enabling fiction – the monster is there, but what are its features?'⁹⁸

This immediately suggests that terrorism studies are in fact researching a form of literary figure, as Zulaika and Douglass locate the terrorist's current prominence as our monstrous Other in its inherent ambiguity. The terrorist is seen as strategically embracing ambiguity, rejecting predictability, military convention, morality, and normativity, making it impossible to have a readymade definition of what constitutes terrorist behaviour.⁹⁹ The adage that 'one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter' captures this figure's perpetual ambivalence. According to Zulaika and Douglass the terrorist is thus a 'formless' figure, dangerous precisely because of its lack of form. Terrorism discourses, therefore, are striving for fullness in an attempt to keep a threatening formlessness at bay. This means that '[p]ersonally, politically, and morally, terrorism is the utterly untouchable . . . contact with, empathy for, or understanding of the terrorist is contaminating and proscribed.'¹⁰⁰ In other words, the methodology of terrorism studies is shaped by the recognition that the terrorist is a tabooed figure, meaning that it becomes imperative for researchers to establish a clear divide between themselves and its contaminating presence. The result is that any attempts to locate oneself in the context from which the terrorist emerged, or self-reflexive critique are in effect:

forbidden to the terrorism expert. There must be no common ground between terrorist Unreason and political Reason. There can be no ambiguity, no problem, no

⁹⁵ Zulaika and Douglass, *Terror and Taboo*, 152–154.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 95–96.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, xi.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 182–183.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 181.

possibility of alternative plots for the same events. Realist discourse is masked as moral imperative. Ironical and skeptical [sic] perspectives must be ruled out.¹⁰¹

Terrorism studies, therefore, do not require a reflexive-critical approach, in which the author assesses the impact that their own investment in a particular socio-political system will have on their research. Instead, it insists that the author should conduct their analysis from the subjective position, to the point where their own agenda can legitimately set the boundaries for the study.

Figuring the terrorist as a threatening formlessness thus secures the scientific integrity of terrorism studies. By eschewing the physical terrorist and installing this amorphous object in their place, terrorism studies replicate the gesture that makes the material world available for the phallic symbolic and thus follow the logic of science according to Irigaray:

All the world is, in a way, transformed in a gathering of objects that the master has to perceive – that is, to see – in an appropriate way, and to arrange into a parallel world thanks to his language, his linguistic logic, his logos.¹⁰²

But the formlessness accorded the terrorist means that the terrorism expert cannot simply stand back from the discourse in arranging the world to suit their logic. For effacing one's own presence within the text is to risk coinciding with the terrorist, as objectivity bestows a formlessness on the author that resonates with the terrorist's own, suggesting the possibility of empathy. The disembodied objective observer, the phallically-constituted scientific ideal, becomes a threat in the face of the terrorist's exploitation of the material. Hence the terrorism expert must make their presence felt by adopting a subjective position within the text. This brings their prose into a perilous proximity with the poetic, as opposed to the scientific, as the author's presence threatens to imply his words come from an immanent rather than all-seeing position.

It is little wonder then that many of the anxieties expressed about the definition of terrorism mirror concerns about the nature of language. As quoted above, Kronenwetter argues that the challenge lies in identifying where terrorism is not an applicable term, implying it has a potentially limitless range. Gearty is disturbed by the concept's 'promiscuous desire to please', by the ability of the word 'terrorism' to absorb an endless spectrum of connotations that means the idea originally communicated by the words has largely disappeared.¹⁰³ For Gearty, this representational flexibility leaves the concept 'vulnerable to being packaged off on

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 180. Italics in original.

¹⁰² Luce Irigaray, 'Listening, Thinking, Teaching', in *Luce Irigaray: Teaching*, ed. Luce Irigaray and Mary Green (London; New York: Continuum, 2008), 231.

¹⁰³ Gearty, *Terror*, 3.

... ethical tangents,¹⁰⁴ in such a way that the 'integrity' of both the word itself and the discourses it spawns 'is persistently under threat.'¹⁰⁵ White warns us that 'confusion arises when people intertwine the terms *terror* and *terrorism* . . . If you think that anything that creates terror is terrorism, the scope of potential definitions becomes limitless.'¹⁰⁶ It is not just the terrorist who possesses a threatening formlessness that requires an epistemology to give it form: the very term 'terrorism' is overshadowed by an ambiguity that must be dismissed, attributed to an abuse of language. The phallic symbolic cherishes its umbilical connection to the material, its ability to connect the abstract signifier to a concrete signified, to categorise and name, to make each word mean one discrete thing. If 'terrorism' is the concept and systems of signs through which the symbolic reasserts itself in the wake of a bloody encounter with the material, it becomes vital that the relationship between signifier and signified is not explicitly compromised in these discourses. To permit ambiguity to persist around the word 'terrorism' itself is to do more than let a formlessness that exposes the chaos beyond our system of understanding to enter into our consciousness.¹⁰⁷ It is rather to expose the symbolic's fallibility in the face of our materiality. The figure of the "terrorist" and the word "terrorism" are therefore treated in startlingly similar ways. In the same breath, the terrorism expert can argue that although there is 'no clear psychopathy is found among terrorists,' still 'there is a nearly universal element in them that can be described as the "true believer."'¹⁰⁸ Similarly, while studies acknowledge there are various applications for the word, there is at its core a 'pure' terrorism.¹⁰⁹ This is a discourse, then, which continually rejects the possibility of ambiguity, asserting the legitimacy of the symbolic by connecting the signifier to a definitive object and condemning equivocation, indeterminateness, and uncertainty as, at best, a misuse of language or, at worst, a gesture of sympathy towards the terrorist other.

Hence, the terrorism expert must insist on the realist nature of the discourse, on the strength of the tie between signifier and signified. There can be no ambiguity about linguistic meaning, for ambiguity coincides with the terrorist Other in threatening the authority of the symbolic order over the material. Moreover, it is the contrast between realist and literary concepts of language that enables terrorism studies to operate as a discipline. For if poetic and literary languages loosen the threads that connect the symbolic to an object, a realist stances insists on its umbilical attachment to a definite object. This insistence is what allows the realist

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 4–5.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 151.

¹⁰⁶ White, *Terrorism*, 4. Italics in original.

¹⁰⁷ Zulaika and Douglass, *Terror and Taboo*, pp 152 – 154.

¹⁰⁸ U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, *Combatting Terrorism*.

¹⁰⁹ Gearty, *Terror*, 16.

to argue that an object can be known, can be understood in its entirety. The terrorism researcher thus works to pin down the literary figure of the terrorist into a definite object, asserting the authority of the symbolic over this threatening formlessness. The presence of the author within the terrorism study becomes vital, acting as a guarantor of the realist connection between language and the world as they insist on the specific meaning of their prose. Unlike the scientist, the terrorism researcher does not need to disguise their presence to claim mastery over matter. Rather, thanks to the formlessness of the object under their lens, terrorism studies assume an almost hyper-phallic authority, in which making a statement is enough to make it true. As terrorism studies use the presence of the author to distinguish its language from poetic notions that infiltrate other social sciences, it not only insists on the authority of the symbolic over the world, it simultaneously proclaims its authors as appropriate masters of such a world-shaping logos.

Terrorism studies therefore adopt a discursive mode that consistently works to maintain the symbolic's claim on the world, in its repeated insistence that signifiers can and do accurately refer to a specific aspect of that world. In essence, it works against the poetic and literary modes that Irigaray associates with other social sciences. Could this lie behind what Silke describes as this discipline's failure as a science? This faith in the signifier's ability to correspond to a definite signified suggests that these texts place a premium on the abstract, as they take it as read that a word or a concept represents something present in the world. This engenders a very particular investigative methodology, an approach that Silke argues is deeply flawed:

[S]urprisingly little research work of scientific merit has been conducted on the perpetrators of terrorist violence . . . Very few published attempts have been made to systematically study terrorists outside of a prison setting or to study in a systematic manner the actual activities carried out as part of the terrorist campaigns.¹¹⁰

Coming from the fields of psychology and criminology, for Silke it is the assertions that terrorism studies literature make about the psychological make-up of terrorists which provide the most damning manifestation of the problematic nature of the discourse and its practices. For Silke, claims that 'endless studies of terrorist psychology reveal . . . they are morally insane, without being clinically psychotic,' or that terrorists are marked out by aberrant behaviour such as 'lifelong impotence', 'psychopathic' tendencies or homosexual paedophilia¹¹¹ fly in the face of 30 years of psychological research. Rather, Silke argues 'all that psychologists can safely

¹¹⁰ Silke, *Research on Terrorism*, 9.

¹¹¹ Burleigh, *Blood*, xiv, 39, 37 and 293 respectively.

say of terrorists is that their outstanding characteristic is their normality.’¹¹² Even though evidence-based research has concluded terrorists are not ‘mentally or psychology [sic] abnormal’ and has instead frequently discovered that ‘terrorists are actually psychologically much healthier and far more stable than other violent criminals,’¹¹³ this is accepted or acknowledged only in a small minority of terrorism studies. Instead, Silke posits that in the vast majority of terrorism studies, ‘the quality of the research tends to become poorer the closer one moves to the actual terrorists and their activities.’¹¹⁴ Already, Silke’s analysis suggests that the material presence of the terrorist causes noticeable distortions in the scientific analysis of terrorism.

Yet in a move that is reminiscent of psychoanalysis’s consigning of women to the dark continent, the discursive trend in terrorism studies is to classify the paucity of its analysis as an inherent characteristic of the object under examination. Professor Walter Reich provides us with an excellent example of such a gesture as he lists the potential limitations a researcher may encounter when studying the psychology of the terrorist. ‘Inaccessibility to direct research on terrorist’ is given relatively low priority, coming sixth on the list. More than this, Reich argues that the value of direct contact with the subject being studied is dubious, as it is in the terrorist’s nature only to participate in a study if they feel the researcher may be converted to their cause ‘even if they are languishing in prison with nothing else to do,’ for the terrorist feels their actions will be diminished by a psychological explanation.¹¹⁵ Reich, like many others in the field, leaves us with a psychological profile of the terrorist built on the prohibition of contact with the terrorist because of their psychological profile. Not only does this pattern of analysis mimic the epistemological loop that establishes the coherence of terrorism studies, it is emblematic of the discourse’s preference for the abstract, a preference that produces a psychology grounded in the absence of the subject, whose absence that psychology reads as the subject’s inherent characteristic.

This lack of adherence to the methodological standards of established psychological investigation dismays Silke, not least because it allows the anecdotal or ‘common sense’

¹¹² Silke, *Research on Terrorism*, 1.

¹¹³ Andrew Silke, ‘The Psychology of Counter-terrorism: Critical Issues and Challenges’, in *The Psychology of Counter-Terrorism*, ed. Andrew Silke (London; New York: Routledge, 2011), 8.

¹¹⁴ Silke, *Research on Terrorism*, 9.; There are some important exceptions to this statement, such as Allen Feldman, *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1991); and Hoffman, *Inside* (2006) The degree to which such studies are exceptional is demonstrated by how frequently they are referenced within other studies.

¹¹⁵ Walter Reich, ‘Understanding Terrorist Behaviour: The Limits and Opportunities of Psychological Inquiry’, in *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind*, ed. Walter Reich (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 274.

explanation precedence over careful analysis. This in itself has very real consequences for counter-terrorist policy.¹¹⁶ But this reluctance to pursue rigorous engagement with the object under scrutiny characterises terrorism studies as a whole, not simply the psychological research. Many of the graphs, tables, and statistics used present discreet data alongside one another to infer a causal link, without providing direct evidence for such a connection. For example, Table 1 places information about the ethnicity, sex, and age, of suicide bombers alongside a record of who they have lost in a particular conflict.

TABLE 22. Instances of Possible Anomic Suicide Terrorism

Date of Suicide Attack	Name	Group	Sex	Age	Family/Friend Killed in Conflict
1. May 9, 1985	Wafaa Nour E'Din	Lebanese	F	23	Husband
2. July 9, 1985	Ibtissam Harb	Lebanese	F	28	Brother
3. Feb. 5, 1985	Hasan Qasir	Lebanese	M	??	Best friend
4. Apr. 6, 1994	Raid Zakarnah	Palestinian	M	19	Best friend
5. Oct. 19, 1994	Saleh Abdul Rahim	Palestinian	M	25	Brother
6. June 7, 2000	Ajsa Gasujewa	Chechen	F	22	Husband, two brothers/sister
7. July 9, 2001	Nafez Saleh al-Nazar	Palestinian	M	26	Brother
8. Aug. 12, 2001	Mohammed Hamood Bakr Nasr	Palestinian	M	28	Best friend
9. Nov. 29, 2001	Aizan Vakhaevna Gazueva	Chechen	F	18	Husband, two children
10. Dec. 5, 2001	Daoud Abu Sway	Palestinian	M	46	Brother
11. Mar. 29, 2002	Eiat al Achras	Palestinian	F	18	First cousin
12. Mar. 2, 2002	Muhammed Ahmad Daramah	Palestinian	M	19	Two first cousins
13. July 27, 2003	Imam-Said Khachukaeva	Chechen	F	27	Husband
14. Aug. 12, 2003	Khamis Jurwan	Palestinian	M	18	Close friend
15. Aug. 19, 2003	Raid Abu Hamid Ritqa	Palestinian	M	29	Close friend
16. Oct. 4, 2003	Hanadi Jaradat	Palestinian	F	27	Fiancé, brother

Source: Chicago Project on Suicide Terrorism. 2004.

Table 1 Source: Richard Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*, (New York: Random House, 2005), 212.

The implication is that the terrorist's actions need to be read in terms of this information, although neither the table, nor the surrounding analysis provide us with evidence as to why these analytical categories are appropriate. More than this, such presentation of information does nothing to address the evidence it has excluded – in this instance, where are the suicide bombers who have not lost a loved one? Similarly, Table 2 demonstrates the evidence struggles against the epistemological framework used to present the data:

¹¹⁶ Silke is particularly weary of the knock-on effects of unsubstantiated claims on the models of behavioural screening now being adopted in airports and transport networks across the U.K. and U.S. See in particular Silke, 'Critical Issues and Challenges'.

TABLE 1. Suicide Terrorist Campaigns, 1980–2003

Completed Campaigns				
Date	Terrorists	Religion	Target Country	# Attacks
1. 1983	Hezbollah	Islam	United States, France	5
2. 1982–1985	Hezbollah	Islam	Israel	11
3. 1985–1986	Hezbollah	Islam	Israel	20
4. 1990–1994	LTTE	Hindu/secular	Sri Lanka	15
5. 1995–2000	LTTE	Hindu/secular	Sri Lanka	54
6. 1994	Hamas	Islam	Israel	2
7. 1994–1995	Hamas	Islam	Israel	9
8. 1995	BKI	Sikh	India	1
9. 1996	Hamas	Islam	Israel	4
10. 1997	Hamas	Islam	Israel	3
11. 1996	PKK	Islam/secular	Turkey	3
12. 1999	PKK	Islam/secular	Turkey	11
13. 2001	LTTE	Hindu/secular	Sri Lanka	6
Ongoing Campaigns, as of December 2003				
14. 1996–	al-Qaeda	Islam	United States, Allies	21
15. 2000–	Chechens	Islam/secular	Russia	19
16. 2000–	Kashmirs	Islam	India	5
17. 2000–	several	Islam/secular	Israel	92
18. 2003–	Iraqi rebels	unknown	United States, Allies	20
Attacks Not Part of Organized Campaigns				14
Total incidents				315

Table 2 Source: Pape, *Dying to Win*, 15.

Although nearly half of the groups listed have a secular element, or are of unknown religious background, the data is still presented in such a way as to suggest religion is a primary epistemological tool for interpreting terrorist action. Presentation is thus crucial in creating a veneer of analytical rigour, but this rapidly peels away on close inspection. How does the inclusion of diagrams of bullets (Figure 1) and guns (Figure 2) aid the scientific understanding of terrorism in way that allows us to predict and prevent terrorist atrocity?



Figure 1 The Russian 5.45 bullet

Figure 1 Source: Clutterbuck, *Terrorism in an Unstable World*, 30.

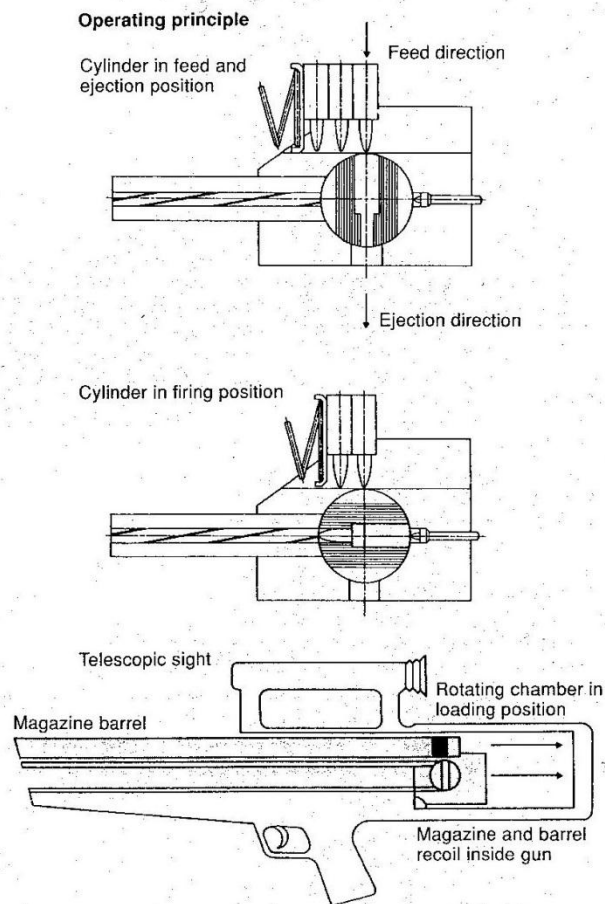
32 *Technological development*

Figure 2 The 4.7 mm G11 rifle
Source: Heckler & Koch specification

Figure 2 Source: Clutterbuck, *Terrorism in an Unstable World*, 32.

Much as the presentation of data infers causal connections between discrete types of data without substantiating them with sustained analysis, so the inclusion of diagrams like Figures 1 and 2 in terrorism texts imply that they are revealing something about the nature of terrorism, when in actuality, such figures tell us little more than what they actually show. In both cases, tables and diagrams act as substitutes for actual critical engagement with the available data. At points, resorting to visual aids exposes these attempts to solicit the authority of scientific or statistical analysis as so much window-dressing. The argument illustrated in Figure 3, for example, perhaps did not merit a diagram.

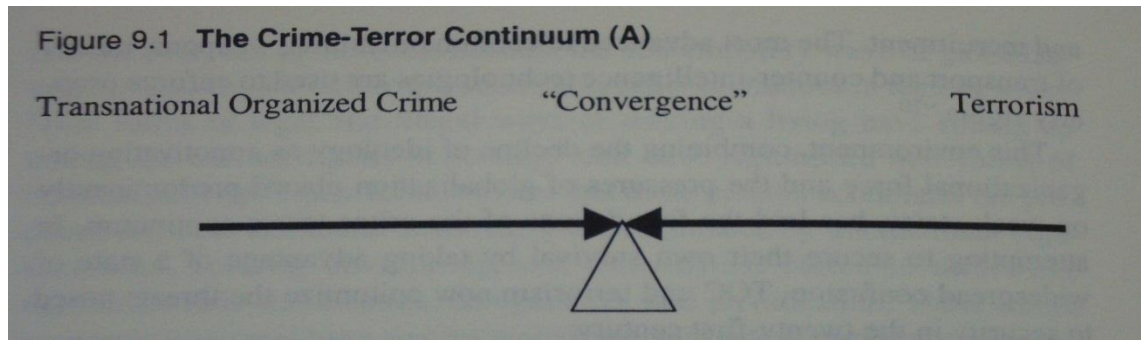


Figure 3 Source: Tamara Makarenko, 'Terrorism and Transnational Organized Crime: Tracing the Crime-Terror Nexus in Southeast Asia' in *Terrorism and Violence in Southeast Asia: Transnational Challenges to States and Regional Stability*, ed. Paul J. Smith (Armonk, New York; London: M.E. Sharpe, 2005), 174.

Such graphic representation of data, however, can work to mask the superficial nature of the evidence and data analysis it is based on, particularly if it seems to support 'common-sense' or culturally-constructed observations about terrorism. Figure 4, for instance, would seem to encapsulate the factors that contribute to suicide terrorism.

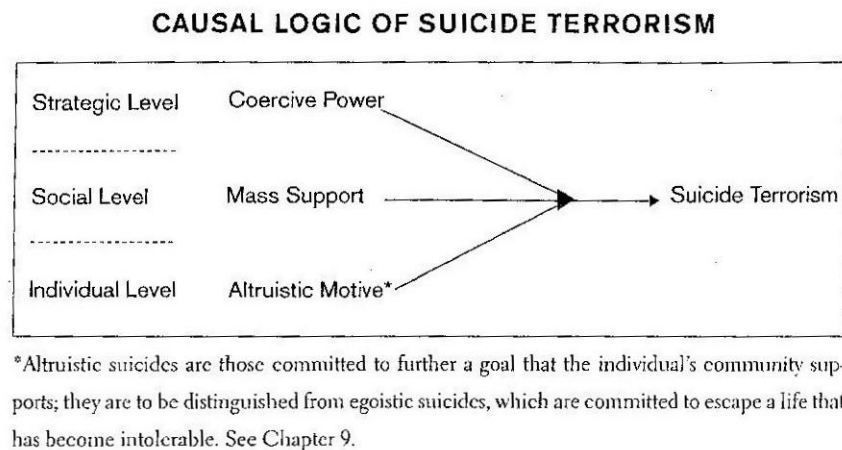


Figure 4 Source: Pape, *Dying to Win*, 22.

Yet this analysis is not based on direct interaction with the terrorists, with their societies, or with the groups that recruited them. The visual aid seduces us into turning a blind eye to this lack of evidence-based analysis and scientific precision.

These are just a few examples of the superficial data analysis that permeates terrorism studies. Silke characterises it as a discipline in which 'researchers and writers [. . .] have developed an enormous tolerance for poor research methods.'¹¹⁷ Indeed, Zulaika and Douglass note that the lack of analytic rigour extends beyond a reluctance to engage with the evidence.

¹¹⁷ Silke, *Research on Terrorism*, 12.

Much of the data used can in fact be traced to other studies which, in turn, rely on other studies, rather than data drawn from direct observation.¹¹⁸ As such, the checks and balances of peer review are circumvented and, if research is latterly discredited, it is only after it has thoroughly infiltrated the field, quietly influencing and informing countless other studies that have recycled the data.¹¹⁹ The lack of adherence to scientific mores means that publication rather than peer review or accuracy ensures a study's 'findings [will] become part of the scientific discourse and recur throughout the terrorism literature.'¹²⁰ This recurrence is made even more likely, as both amateur and academic writers frequently make minimal use of references, masking their sources and regurgitating previous research as established fact.¹²¹ The widespread acceptance that the author sets, rather than meets, the research standards in terrorism studies produces a discipline that Silke, one of its leading figures, despairs of: 'while the volume of what has been written is both massive and growing, the quality of the content leaves much to be desired. So much is dross, repetitive and ill-informed.'¹²²

At its most pronounced, authority accorded to the word of the terrorism writer produces texts in which overt political slants inform the interpretation of data, be it in Sinclair's unabashed pro-Bush stance, Burleigh's clear leaning to the right, or Herman and O'Sullivan's aggressive Leftist polemic, *The Terrorism Industry*.¹²³ But while readers can compensate for overt political bias, the experts' assumption of epistemological mastery leads to erroneous or unsupported conclusions being accepted as fact, and to a failure to predict or prevent terrorist activity. For instance, Burleigh informs us that bombing of Harrods department store in London took place on 18th December, 1984, when in fact it took place on 17th December 1983.¹²⁴ One suspects we would find more such errors on closer examination.

¹¹⁸ Zulaika and Douglass, *Terror and Taboo*, 55.

¹¹⁹ As one example among many, Zulaika and Douglass cite the infamous book by Claire Sterling, *The Terror Network: The Secret War of International Terrorism* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981). Her research confirmed ties between the Soviet Union and terrorist activity across the globe. By the time it was discovered that her 'research' was based solely on CIA misinformation, her conclusions had been taken up so thoroughly by the terrorism studies discourse that it is impossible to weed out its influence. More worryingly, her work continued to shape the policies of the Reagan administration even after Sterling's sources had been revealed. Zulaika and Douglass, *Terror and Taboo*, 14–15, 51–55.

¹²⁰ Zulaika and Douglass, *Terror and Taboo*, 55.

¹²¹ For example, the frequent use of unattributed quotes throughout terrorism studies texts.

¹²² Silke, *Research on Terrorism*, 1–2.

¹²³ Edward S. Herman and Gerry O'Sullivan, *The 'Terrorism' Industry: The Experts and Institutions That Shape Our View of Terror* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989) Herman and O'Sullivan had legitimate concerns about this misrepresentation of data on terrorism by government and media sources throughout the 1970s and 1980s, as there were concerted attempts within the U.S. to link terrorist activity across the globe to the Soviet Union. However, the tone and political bias of their study, as well as their own presentation of data, ends up replicating the style of the very material they are critiquing, leaving us with something resembling a conspiracy theory.

¹²⁴ Burleigh, *Blood*, 330.

Similarly, Clutterbuck predicts the rise of the micro-lite or vertical take-off craft will bring about an end to terrorism, as this form of transport would make it 'almost impossible for terrorists to pick out their targets.'¹²⁵ Taken in isolation, these are one-off mistakes, or potentially amusing predictions. Yet the cover of the first edition of Burleigh's book boasts a recommendation from the then soon-to-be-Prime Minister David Cameron, demonstrating the potential influence such texts have. Clutterbuck, too, was an influential expert and his argument that greater governmental surveillance of the civilian population is vital for counter-terrorism is reiterated by other experts such as Paul Wilkinson.¹²⁶ Yet the same interpretation of evidence facilitates Clutterbuck's demands for biometric monitoring of the population as his arguments for the micro-lite.¹²⁷ This surely suggests that all such recommendations are based on, at best, misguided interpretations of the available data.

As noted previously, Silke attributes the flawed science of terrorism studies as resulting from its chequered past, as a discursive practice that emerged in the cracks between other disciplines. But this does not account for why this current form continues to maintain its influence and remain largely unchallenged despite these overt flaws. Silke suggests that this troubled genealogy works to secure the authority of terrorism studies, as it has engendered a:

latent hostility to studies which do attempt to produce quantitative data which is then subjected to rigorous analysis. Sadly, this situation has encouraged the field to stagnate with little overall progress being made in the past decade in terms of our understanding of terrorism.¹²⁸

But Silke stops short of asking what nurtured this hostility towards thorough analysis in the first place. Zulaika and Douglass account for the adversarial attitude by identifying the terrorist as a modern-day manifestation of civilisation's tabooed monster. Yet can we not take this further, when we recognise that the terrorist becomes such a figure thanks to the forgetting of material presence? This forgetting manifests itself in the methodologies of terrorism studies, methodologies that require only the lightest engagement with the facts and figures, with the terrorists themselves, producing psychological studies of absent subjects, anthropological research without contact with people, scientific classification and prediction based on a prohibition of analysis.

¹²⁵ Clutterbuck, *Unstable World*, 182.

¹²⁶ Wilkinson, *Terrorism Vs Democracy*.

¹²⁷ In fact, Clutterbuck provides no evidence to support his claims. Rather, he works on the basis that if the technology exists, it will work. Nowhere does he support his argument that securing 'identity' with biometrics will help prevent terrorism, nor his assumption that greater surveillance of the population directly reduces terrorist activity. Clutterbuck, *Unstable World*, 219–221.

¹²⁸ Silke, *Research on Terrorism*, 12.

Terrorism studies, then, is a highly abstract discourse, where the epistemological framework is maintained at the expense of genuine inquiry. Already we can see the parallels between this discursive gesture and the symbolic's subjugation of the material. But it is not just Irigaray who posits that such thinking can be understood as terroristic. Martha Crenshaw, one of the world's leading terrorism academics, argues that:

The beliefs of terrorists are characterised by abstraction, impersonality, and impracticality. They may be complex to the point of abstruseness or naively simple. The provision of moral justification for violence is an integral component. The world is divided between good, represented by the terrorist organisation, and a much stronger and pervasive evil, usually embodied in governmental authority and the social class identified as supporting the state. The terrorists see themselves as elites of superior consciousness and perceptiveness, acting alone through necessary and appropriate violence, with eventual victory guaranteed by the forces of history.¹²⁹

In its reduction of the perpetrators of violence to a unified figure of the terrorist, its prohibition on identification with such a figure, and its refusal to interact with the evidence, the discursive practice of terrorism studies resembles the thought processes associated with the very object they aim to understand. They divide the world between good and evil, the morally correct and the corrupt, and in doing so, implicate the cultures, societies, and countries from which such figures emerge in the violence of individuals. Finally, the authors that produce this discourse rarely question their fitness or ability to describe the mechanisms of terrorism and to recommend solutions. It seems that the epistemological framework of terrorism echoes the very thinking that it argues produces terrorism. It is little wonder, then, that such an epistemology formulates counter-terrorism as the only viable response.

The Substratum of Terrorism Discourses

It is here that the overlaps between the discourses on terrorism come to the fore. If the terrorism studies that inform the political and public spheres are understood as endorsing counter-terrorism as a result of their particular epistemological and methodological approach, other discussions of terrorism are more than just alternative understandings: they become the spaces in which we have the potential to think and articulate a different response to terrorism. This means that we must pay particular attention to resonances between the terms provided by terrorism studies and the political rhetoric they inform, and attempts to critique or think beyond those terms, for any such common ground should alert us to the fact that both critique and criticised are potentially rendering the same thing excessive in order to allow their discussion to unfurl. Such instances of coalescence are signposts showing where shared

¹²⁹ Martha Crenshaw, 'The Subjective Reality of the Terrorist: Ideological and Psychological Factors in Terrorism', in *Current Perspectives on International Terrorism*, ed. Robert O. Slater and Michael Stohl (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1988), 20.

assumptions are closing down potential avenues of thought. Zulaika and Douglass's insightful 'metaterrorism' analysis is an illuminating example. In their description of the taboos permeating terrorism discourses, they share Irigaray's sense that something is necessarily repressed to allow a discourse to unfold. As we have seen, they argue that the terrorist is the latest figuring of a formlessness that our culture deems threatening. But as the title of their work suggests, Zulaika and Douglass rely on Freud's *Totem and Taboo* for their understanding of how taboos are constructed and how they operate within a culture. In this work, Freud surmises that in its earliest stages, our society mirrored Darwin's primal horde, with 'a violent and jealous father who keeps all the females for himself and drives away his sons as they grow up.'¹³⁰ This situation continues until the exiled brothers come together and overthrow the despotic father, who they then devour. Having destroyed their father and gained access to the forbidden females, two taboos thus emerge, taboos that Freud identifies as the beginnings of 'human morality.'¹³¹ The first is the prohibition protecting the 'totem' animal, which serves as a means for making amends for the brutal murder of the primordial father, who in death has now become a powerful figure yet again, thanks to the ambivalent feelings of his murderous sons. Secondly, in order to maintain the brotherly bond and ensure each brother has some access to females, they must 'institute the law against incest, by which they all alike renounced the women who they desired and who had been their chief motive for despatching their father.'¹³² Taboo, then, is from the beginning, both about monitoring and mediating relationships between men and enshrining their access to the 'horde' of women.

Zulaika and Douglass hence frame their analysis with the very text that Irigaray critiques through her use of *The Oresteia*. As we have seen, Irigaray stresses that women and the feminine have already been reduced to the status of a treasure trove, a possession, an object within the system of masculine relations by the time the murder of the primordial father takes place. In other words, the maternal-material body is forgotten prior to the emergence of taboo. The forgetting of the body is crucial for Zulaika and Douglass's proposition that it is 'terrorism's play with radical formlessness that empowers it as the modern world's enchanted discourse.'¹³³ The ambiguous nature of terrorism is not only a threat to our symbolic stability, it is 'an enormously efficacious stimulant of the collective imagination, since it clearly garners and holds media attention all out of proportion to the course of actual events.'¹³⁴ According to Zulaika and Douglass, this is because the imagination

¹³⁰ Freud, *Totem*, XIII:141.

¹³¹ Ibid., XIII:144.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Zulaika and Douglass, *Terror and Taboo*, 183.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

is also characterised by an 'inconstancy of form', and this congruence between stimulant and imagination induces a 'collective enchantment.'¹³⁵ This connection between a formless imagination and collective enchantment is an interesting contrast with Spivak's formulation of the imagination as crucial for ethical thought. Whereas Spivak is arguing that imagination presents us with the possibility of difference, Zulaika and Douglass locate the power accorded to terrorism as being rooted in the imagination's capacity to foreclose independent thought.

Here, the incisive and compelling critique in *Terror and Taboo* replicates the presumptions of the discourses it deconstructs. Terrorism studies accept universally that 'one of the aims of terrorist organisations is to convince sceptical audiences to see the world in their terms.'¹³⁶ Indeed, in most cases, this is terrorism's defining trait: 'Violence is unequivocally terrorist . . . when the purpose behind the violence is to communicate a message to a wider audience.'¹³⁷ Yet, just as in Zulaika and Douglass's text, this wider audience remains a shadowy, formless presence across the discourse. While psychological studies of the impact of terrorism on an audience argue that 'exposure rates to traumatic events far exceed prevalence rates for psychopathology, suggesting a differential response pattern across victims',¹³⁸ such research suffers the same fate as psychological investigations of terrorists, as it is ignored in the vast majority of terrorism research. The focus falls instead on the complexities of the relationship between the terrorist and media, as studies assess the extent to which the two 'appear to be locked in a relationship of considerable mutual benefit.'¹³⁹ Again, although work such as Laqueur's *Voices of Terror* testify to the fact that anxieties about the communication of fear to the masses for political ends pre-dates both the term 'terrorism' and the mass media of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, terrorism studies consistently read the current configuration between the two as unique.¹⁴⁰ The lack of historical perspective in the bulk of terrorism research means that interrogations of the relationship between terror and the media revolve around whether terrorists are 'deliberately

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Crenshaw, 'Subjective Reality', 12.

¹³⁷ Gearty, *Terror*, 1.

¹³⁸ Ginny Sprang, 'The Psychological Impact of Isolated Acts of Terrorism', in *Terrorists, Victims and Society: Psychological Perspective on Terrorism and Its Consequences*, ed. Andrew Silke (Chichester: Wiley, 2003), 135.

¹³⁹ Wilkinson, *Terrorism Vs Democracy*, 149.

¹⁴⁰ See Walter Laqueur, ed., *Voices of Terror: Manifestos, Writings, and Manuals of Al Qaeda, Hamas, and Other Terrorists from Around the World and Throughout the Ages* (Naperville, IL.; Bath: Sourcebooks, 2004) Although Laqueur does not make this specific connection, in placing the work of Aristotle, Cicero, Plutarch, Brutus and others on tyranny alongside present-day manifestos on terrorism, this collection makes this connection apparent.

organizing their actions for the key news values of drama, violence and unexpected,¹⁴¹ or if the media are 'vulnerable to exploitation and manipulation by ruthless terrorist organizations,' who perpetuate atrocities with 'the object of seducing or trapping the media into giving the terrorists huge publicity.'¹⁴² In not recognising that the communication of fear to the masses was possible before the appearance of modern-day mass media, terrorism studies assert that terrorists use the media as 'an instrument to disseminate the messages of threat and intimidation,'¹⁴³ without ever pursuing an in-depth analysis of how those messages are received. The media becomes the primary focus of terrorism studies, not the audience presumed to be terrorised.

Yet the presence of an audience is central to the very concept of terrorist violence, as Whittaker illustrates in his definition:

Terrorism is specifically designed to have far-reaching psychological effects beyond the immediate victim or object of the terrorist attack. It is meant to instil fear within, and thereby intimidate, a wider 'target audience'¹⁴⁴

The research assumes it is a desire to manipulate the emotions of a target audience that lies at the heart of terrorist action, but this audience is rarely placed under scrutiny in terrorism studies. Instead, the research tends to share the terrorist's assumption that there is such an audience waiting to absorb their message. Thus, although Whittaker argues terrorism is designed to have psychological effects, the psychology of the audience is rarely considered in such research. Instead, the overarching assumption is that the audience of terrorism 'regardless of their social class, politics or religious faith. . . all bleed and grieve in the same way.'¹⁴⁵ As the fascination with the modern media's connection to terrorism suggests, the audience of terrorism is characterised as sharing a universal humanity that transcends all historical, social, cultural contexts. Indeed, Kronenwetter suggests that terrorist violence arises out of a 'refusal to acknowledge a shared humanity with those they perceive as the enemy,'¹⁴⁶ a refusal, in essence, to remain part of the crowd. When Zulaika and Douglass argue that '[t]o the extent that it terrifies the public, terrorism achieves its goal,'¹⁴⁷ they therefore reduce the target audience of terrorism into the amorphous notion of the 'public' that underpins the

¹⁴¹ Philip Schlesinger, Graham Murdock, and Philip Elliott, *Televising 'Terrorism': Political Violence in Popular Culture* (London: Comedia, 1983), 12.

¹⁴² Wilkinson, *Terrorism Vs Democracy*, 154.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 151.

¹⁴⁴ Whittaker, *Terrorism Reader*, 9.

¹⁴⁵ Burleigh, *Blood*, xiv.

¹⁴⁶ Kronenwetter, *Terrorism*, 14.

¹⁴⁷ Zulaika and Douglass, *Terror and Taboo*, 17.

analysis of terrorism studies: '[t]error is defeat by cowardice for the crowd.'¹⁴⁸ Although personal accounts of the experience of terrorism such as Susan Hirsch's *In the Moment of Greatest Calamity*¹⁴⁹ are increasingly considered part of the canon of Terrorism Studies, once terrorism research moves beyond the sphere of the direct victims of violence, the very people terrorism is presumed to be addressing are left unexamined, swallowed up in notions of public, audience, and the masses. Thus, while Sprang's study of the impact of the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing on people in cities across the U.S. demonstrates that factors such as physical and temporal proximity, memory, gender, age, and general psychological health are all significant in an individual's perception of events, she is a minority voice. Faced with terrorist atrocity, it seems the audience as is formless as the terrorist, becoming a homogenous mass to such a degree that '[w]e are all the victims of a successful terrorist attack.'¹⁵⁰

This nebulous audience arguably permeates critiques that do attempt to think about the transmission of terror and the symbolic consequences of such communication. Baudrillard, for example, argues that September 11th, 2001, tolled the death knell for the West's relationship to the real. In contrast to interpretations of the attacks as a wake-up call, or as representative of the real world crashing into the fantasy-riddled world of late twentieth-century America, Baudrillard claims:

An excess of violence is not enough to open on to reality. For reality is a principle, and it is this principle that is lost. Reality and fiction are inextricable, and the fascination with the attack is primarily a fascination with the image.¹⁵¹

In Baudrillard's eyes, the spectacular collapse of the World Trade Center brought about the image's final conquest of reality. Throughout his oeuvre, Baudrillard reiterates the claim that the image itself 'is violent because what happens there is the murder of the Real, the vanishing point of Reality.'¹⁵² In much the same way as the symbolic overwrites the material in favour of its abstraction, so Baudrillard argues that the image 'makes the real substance disappear.'¹⁵³ The cultural fascination with and proliferation of images had already impoverished our engagement with reality, as images pre-figure our interaction with the

¹⁴⁸ Sinclair, *Anatomy of Terror*, xvi.

¹⁴⁹ Susan F. Hirsch, *In the Moment of Greatest Calamity: Terrorism, Grief, and a Victim's Quest for Justice* (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006).

¹⁵⁰ Gearty, *Terror*, 9.

¹⁵¹ Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism and Other Essays*, trans. Chris Turner (London; New York: Verso, 2002), 28.

¹⁵² Jean Baudrillard, 'The Violence of the Image' (presented at the International Symposium, part 'Media-City', Seoul's Biennial, Seoul, 2002), paragraph 8, <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/jean-baudrillard/articles/the-violence-of-the-image/>.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, paragraph 9.

world. In essence, Baudrillard asserts that images of the 'real' produce a 'forced consensus and interaction'¹⁵⁴ with the world, while the realisation of fantasy through virtual technologies means that we even have pre-established modes for understanding the unimaginable. Such is the power of the image in our culture that it limits our capacity to respond to the world in a way that has not already been established. Images, then, have a 'neutralizing power'¹⁵⁵ as they shut down our imaginative capabilities and our connection to the real. For Baudrillard, the images of Manhattan that Tuesday morning finally severed our culture's tenuous connection to the real, as 'it is the radicality of the spectacle, the brutality of the spectacle, which alone is original and irreducible. The spectacle of terrorism forces the terrorism of spectacle upon us.'¹⁵⁶ The image of terror, in other words, becomes that which shapes our reality, deposing reality itself. We had entered an eternal house of mirrors.

Slavoj Žižek echoes Baudrillard's thought as he claims that 'the question we should have asked ourselves as we stared at the TV screens on September 11 is simply: *Where have we already seen the same thing over and over again?*'¹⁵⁷ Drawing parallels between the second plane hitting the World Trade Center and a scene from Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963), in which 'a single bird . . . unexpectedly enters the frame above right, and hits [Melanie] on the head',¹⁵⁸ Žižek goes on to compare a variety of films and the responses to the attacks across political and cultural spheres. For Žižek, such comparisons demonstrate that the attacks on Manhattan already existed in the cultural imagination prior to their unfolding. Recognising this means:

[w]e should therefore invert the standard reading according to which the WTC explosions were the intrusion of the Real which shattered our illusionary Sphere: quite the reverse – it was before the WTC collapse that we lived in our reality, perceiving Third World horrors as something which was [sic] not actually part of our social reality, as something which existed (for us) as a spectral apparition on the (TV) screen – and what happened on September 11 was that this fantasmatic screen apparition entered our reality. It is not that reality entered our image: the image entered and shattered our reality.¹⁵⁹

Hence, while for Baudrillard, the images of the attacks sealed the illusionary sphere, Žižek argues they were cultural fantasies made brutally real. As such, Žižek controversially claims that 'America got what it fantasized about.'¹⁶⁰ According to Žižek, this realisation of cultural

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., paragraph 4.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., paragraph 6.

¹⁵⁶ Baudrillard, *Spirit*, 30.

¹⁵⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real: Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates* (London: Verso, 2002), 17 Italics in original.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 14–15.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 16.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

fantasy exposed the West's 'passion for the real' as yet another layer of phantasmatic obfuscation. In his analysis, while the West characterises the image as the means through which we can confront reality, be it through news or documentary footage, reality TV, or gritty cinema, this 'ruthless pursuit of the Real behind appearances was the *ultimate stratagem to avoid confronting the Real*.'¹⁶¹ Like Baudrillard, Žižek locates the image or the representation of reality as working to blind us to the Real.

Both Baudrillard and Žižek therefore enact the kind of critical gesture that Irigaray calls for, by looking to the ways in which our own culture is bound up with the terroristic violence visited upon it. Similarly, both locate the point of collusion as being in the privileging of the abstract over the material. Baudrillard's analysis is arguably borne out by the formation of terrorism studies, as well as wider terrorism discourses. Can we not read the repetitive nature of terrorism research as coincident with the privileged position the media is accorded in such studies, suggesting that there is a genuine sense in which media representations dictate or limit the capacity to think about terrorism? Similarly, the cyclical nature of terrorism-counter-terrorism policies, a discursive cycle littered with clichés and action-movie rhetoric, implies we are continually moving along pre-established lines, rather than spontaneously responding to a specific set of circumstances.

Žižek's diagnosis of terrorism and the responses to it as culturally-constituted symptoms also echoes the Irigarayan analysis we have pursued so far. Yet as Baudrillard mourns the death of the principle called "reality", he assumes no one else will be at the funeral. Such is the power he accords to the image that 'people are no more victims of the image: they transform themselves into images – they exist only as screens, or in a superficial dimension.'¹⁶² Once again, the audience is an amorphous mass, undone by the enthralling power of the image. Indeed, while elsewhere Baudrillard makes specific reference to cinematic and televisual images, by the time we reach *The Spirit of Terrorism* and 'The Violence of the Image,' the images themselves have coalesced into a formless image, an image that presses in on the spectator and carries them away from reality by the very force of its presence. There is no sense in which one can pause in front of Baudrillard's terroristic image, no sense of the image in context. His image bombards us, surrounds us, leaves us overwhelmed and unable to see the real at its fringes. The formlessness of the audience combines with the formless image to overwrite the distinctions between different forms of image, and with it, the possibility that different forms invoke different kinds of 'looking.' Whether consciously or not, Baudrillard has arguably taken the cinematic experience of the image as the universal model of looking. The

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 24 Italics in original.

¹⁶² Baudrillard, 'Violence', 11.

sensation of immersion in the image, the blocking out of extraneous context, the silent, disembodied observer who gives themselves over to the procession of images placed before them, all echo classic models of cinematic experience.¹⁶³ As such, Baudrillard's rearticulates the blithe acceptance in terrorism studies and discourses that the media's dissemination of information about an atrocity is enough to convey terror to audiences en masse. This common ground unsurprisingly means Baudrillard has little to offer in terms of disrupting the existing epistemology of terror. Indeed, his overriding message seems to be that it is too late to instigate meaningful change.

The real/Real is far more tenacious in Žižek's formulation. In his Lacanian-Hegelian approach, Žižek repeatedly asserts that the real cannot be lost, but is instead unavoidable, the sticky underside of our culture.¹⁶⁴ For Žižek, after Lacan, there is no possibility of an encounter with the real. It will always remain beyond the reach of culture and consciousness, and indeed, both are constituted by the real's inaccessibility.¹⁶⁵ Rather than emerging from the material world, radical change instead comes from unveiling the fantasies that structure our ideologies. By recognising that our perception of reality is structured by fantasy, we can create new fictions from scratch. But like Baudrillard, Žižek's approach requires reducing a culture, an audience, to a formless monolithic presence. This assumption manifests itself, for example, as he reads Hollywood's productions as being representative of America's fantasies. Moreover, bringing about change in such a formulation relies on asserting, first, that one has uncovered the fundamental truth concealed in a particular symptom, and secondly, that one can alter or produce a fantasy in a manner that is appropriate to everyone. In this sense, then, Žižek's critical gesture relies on a fundamental forgetting of his psychoanalytic roots, for there is no recognition that an individual's psyche will inflect their relation to cultural fantasy. Instead, Žižek seems to be interpreting the relation as purely top-down when it comes to bringing about cultural change.¹⁶⁶ As Žižek moves through cultural symptoms, analysing what they really mean, he relies on the *a priori* presumption that the masses merge into a homogenous entity, devoid of individual characteristics and fantasy. Thus, as he concludes that the 'true aim' of the war on terrorism is a 'shattering of our liberal-democratic consensus,'¹⁶⁷ he comes

¹⁶³ See for example Christian Metz, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Imaginary Signifier* (London: Macmillan Press, 1982).

¹⁶⁴ Sarah Kay, *Žižek: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), 4.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁶⁶ Interestingly, Irigaray accuses Lacan of working in a similar way, as he uses the psychoanalytic encounter to endorse his models, rather than actually engaging with the analysand. See 'The Poverty of Psychoanalysis' Luce Irigaray, *To Speak Is Never Neutral*, trans. Gail Schwab (New York; London: Continuum, 2002), 205–226.

¹⁶⁷ Žižek, *Desert of Real*, 154.

perilously close to reproducing the opening gambit of that war. By installing himself as the master able to diagnose the truth behind the symptom¹⁶⁸, Žižek mirrors Bush's assumption of epistemological mastery, colonising the symbolic with an authoritative interpretation.

The premise that supports both terrorism studies and these metaterrorism critiques is that it is possible for individual psyches to merge into a mass consciousness in such a way as to overpower the individual's specificity. In essence, these discourses rest on an unarticulated notion of group psychology. Terrorism studies, in particular, rely on a model of the target audience as the kind of 'obedient herd' that Freud rethinks in 'Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego'.¹⁶⁹ Freud concurs with McDougall in so far as he accepts that:

Before members of a random crowd of people can constitute something like a group, in the psychological sense, a condition has to be fulfilled: these individuals must have something in common with one another, a common interest in an object, a similar emotional bias in some situation of other, and . . . 'some degree of reciprocal influence' . . . The higher the degree of 'this mental homogeneity', the more readily do the individuals form a psychological group, and the more striking are the manifestations of a group mind.¹⁷⁰

By taking this common object or situation to be a universal humanity or a ubiquitous investment in culture, terrorism discourses homogenise not just an isolated group, but an entire population. Thus, as Freud argues that group psychology emerges as each individual's ego ideal is replaced by an object which facilitates an 'identification with other individuals . . . made possible by their having the same relation to the object',¹⁷¹ such discourses presume that the audience of terrorism has an undifferentiated relation to the world. As we have seen, Irigaray's analysis of the status of the feminine and women in relation to the symbolic order problematises this assumption: how can women be said to have the same relation to the world of objects when they are forced to speak in a phallically-informed tongue? Indeed, Irigaray's studies of the linguistic habits of European men and women, boy and girls, have shown how the different relations the sexes have to the world manifest themselves in speech:

women seek to communicate, especially to hold dialogue, but they address above all to *him* or *them-him* . . . *men*, for their part, take interest in the concrete object if it is theirs (*my car, my watch, my pipe*, etc.) or in the abstract object if it is defined by men and belongs to a community of men to express their psychological states, their genealogical or familial problems; men avoid staying and talking as two, especially two

¹⁶⁸ See for example Tim Dean, 'Art as Symptom: Žižek and the Ethics of Psychoanalytic Criticism', *Diacritics* 32, no. 2 (2002): 21–41.

¹⁶⁹ Sigmund Freud, 'Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego', in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Works*, ed. James Strachey and Anna Freud, vol. XVIII, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud (London: Vintage, 2001), 81.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 143.

who are different, and they would rather remain in a scarcely differentiated group of their own gender.¹⁷²

Freud's reading of the libidinal structures of the group mind endorse Irigaray's last statement, for he argues that '[i]t seems certain that homosexual love is far more compatible with group ties.'¹⁷³ Returning once again to the primordial horde, Freud posits that because it was love of women that inspired the prehistoric sons to murder their all-powerful father, heterosexual desire can have no place in the libidinal compulsions that form a group psychology.¹⁷⁴ Instead, it is a desire for the same, for the undifferentiated that brings a group together, to such an extent that:

Even where groups are formed which are composed of both men and women the distinction between the sexes plays no part. There is scarcely any sense in asking whether the libido which keeps groups together is of a homosexual or of a heterosexual nature, for it is not differentiated according to the sexes, and particularly shows a complete disregard for the aims of the genital organization of the libido.¹⁷⁵

When it comes to group psychology, then, sexual difference is overwritten to such an extent that Freud accords the non-masculine the same desires and drives as the masculine.

Freud's analysis of group psychology thus makes explicit the premise that subtends the concept of the audience in terrorism discourses: the audience exists as a homogenised, sexually-indistinct mass. More specifically, the target audience of terrorism is 'hom(m)o-sexual'¹⁷⁶ in the Irigarayan sense, as individuals are understood as being the 'same' and are brought together through this equivalence, an equivalence that accords both men and women a masculine status in Freud's formulation. This is not simply a disavowal of sexual difference. In Freud's figuring of group psychology, we see women achieving the same kind of identification as men. A group consciousness thus transcends the limits of sexual identity, as the non-masculine slips the bounds of her natural passivity, darkness, mystery, and identifies with the group mind. This suggests that such conceptualisations of mass consciousness are underpinned by a form of Cartesian split, construing the mind and the body as distinct entities. For Irigaray, understanding the human body as 'containing' the spirit or consciousness is a direct result of the repression of the maternal role in the formation of the subject. By forgetting that the womb is the first world we inhabit, a world that constitutes both our initial physicality and consciousness, we transform the mother's body into 'a container for the child',

¹⁷² Irigaray, *Key Writings*, 38 Italics in original.

¹⁷³ Freud, 'Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego', 141.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Irigaray, *This Sex*, 171.

or 'a container for the man' as he enters her body to fulfil his sexual desire.¹⁷⁷ Hence, as the maternal-feminine and the material world are consigned to an umbilical relation to the symbolic, the body is constructed as containing our subjectivity, rather than in any way being coincident with it. The body-as-container privileges the internal, the space marked off as interior by the presence of skin, rather than recognising the possibility that the skin and the flesh may in fact constitute that internal space.

This modelling of body-as-container, this severance of consciousness from body, is the fundamental assumption behind the concept of terrorism itself. For in allowing the audience to remain a formless entity, Zulaika and Douglass inadvertently overlook another taboo at work in terrorism discourses. In reading terrorism studies as a symbolic discourse struggling against a resurgent material, we have seen its authors facing a problem that other sciences are not faced with; they cannot simply 'forget' the physical world. They are in fact too much aware of it, promoting a willingness to accept flaws and contradictions that have the potential to unravel the authority of their work. Nowhere does this need to privilege the abstract over the material manifest itself so prominently than in the necessity to leave the audience of terrorism as an ideal, immaterial presence. For although we are told repeatedly that the terrorist's key aim is to 'convince sceptical audiences to see the world in their terms,'¹⁷⁸ terrorism studies fail to elucidate why the sensation of terror would help terrorists achieve this aim. Indeed, notably absent from the epistemological toolkit of terrorism studies is any in-depth analysis of the audience's experience of terror, what terror actually is, what it means to be terrorised. At no point is it asked how the experience of 'terror' works in the terrorist's favour, indeed, if it works at all, and if it does why? The question of how looking at an image, hearing a news report, watching footage of a terrorist atrocity translates into a sensation of terror within the audience is never asked. Rather, we are told:

Terrorism beams into our homes through television screens, it assaults us in the newspapers and magazines . . . People do not seem to worry about the definition of terrorism at such times. They simply feel terror when they see the violence.¹⁷⁹

Terrorism studies and discourses thus take it as a given that terrorism 'terrorises' the intended audience. More than this, they assume that terrorist acts have a uniform efficacy in the production of terror, so much so that the sensation of terror is not considered worth examining. As such, although studies such as Sprang's identify a variety of factors as inflecting our experience of such atrocity, these are rendered irrelevant as the audience remains an

¹⁷⁷ Irigaray, *Ethics*, 37.

¹⁷⁸ Crenshaw, 'Subjective Reality', 12.

¹⁷⁹ White, *Terrorism*, 4.

indistinct mass, a disembodied group who all experience terror the same way. The concept of terrorism, on the side of the analysts and the terrorists both, relies absolutely on the assumption that people will be terrorised, whatever the act, however its 'brute facts' are communicated. And yet what this terror is and why it should be conceived of as useful by those who induce it is a topic on which terrorism studies remains largely silent. The tabooed nature of such a question becomes clear when we reformulate it; to query the effect the deliberate maiming and murder of 'innocent' people has on the broader population inevitably risks being accused of disrespecting those who have suffered in such an event. Ultimately one risks losing out to the accusation of disrespecting the dead.

Yet it is precisely the failure to ask these questions that allows the dominant voices within a discourse to claim symbolic mastery, to proclaim what each individual death represents, whether these pronouncements come from the terrorists themselves, or those speaking in the name of the terrorised. This failure is highlighted by one of the few sustained studies of terrorism in context, Allen Feldman's *Formations of Violence*. His impressive linguistic analysis of interviews conducted with paramilitaries, victims, and the residents living in Belfast at the height of The Troubles demonstrates that the continued experience of violence collapsed spatial and temporal distinctions in such a way that identity becomes defined by context, rather than individual subjectivity. This is not least because, in such a context, violent death brings about an 'instrumental staging and commodification of the body.'¹⁸⁰ This commodification is a 'process by which an entity violently expelled from the social order is transformed into an emissary, a cultural donor and a bearer of seminal political messages.'¹⁸¹ Within the socio-historical context for Northern Ireland, then, terrorist violence renders the identity of the victim almost irrelevant, as the message is inscribed on the body through injuries suffered and the choice of location in which the corpse is left. Murder in this context means 'the individual body is constructed as a mass article and as a social hieroglyph that opens the possibility of mythical communication with the masses.'¹⁸² The presumption that, in the face of terrorism, entire populations will be uniformly terrorised relies on the same gesture, turning the audience of terror into an undifferentiated mass that is defined by its context and the violence inflicted upon it. The audience becomes a container for representation, into which meaning is poured, be it by the terrorists themselves, or the governments who pursue counter-terrorism in its name.

¹⁸⁰ Feldman, *Formations*, 8.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

It is here that we return to Spivak's formulation that response requires the construction of a subject, as well as its object. While the terrorists frequently explicitly state what they have taken their intended audience to represent, the same is not true of terrorism studies and discourses. What meaning is being assigned to the terrorised public in these discourses? What does the epistemological framework of terrorism take the audience to represent? In other words, what normative notions colonise the public body as the epistemology of terrorism works to produce a response in their name? Both Freud and Irigaray argue that the very concept of audience that underwrites terrorism discourses enacts an overwriting of sexual difference, immediately suggesting that the mass is read in terms of phallic-masculinity. This is borne out as we look at the moments where the unarticulated notion of terror that allows terrorism studies to unfold grazes the surface of the discourse. Welch tells us that thanks to the media's inflated claims, 'public fear of terrorism may be disproportionate to the actual risks, leading to choices and behaviours that are not entirely rational,' leaving the public open to exploitation not only by the terrorists, but from opportunist politicians as well.¹⁸³ The U.S. Army Field Manual describes a similar irrationality as awakened in the masses in the wake of terror, as '[t]he public demands protection that the state cannot give. Frustrated and fearful, the people then demand that the government make concessions to stop the attacks.'¹⁸⁴ This sits in stark contrast with the same manual's figure of the 'rational terrorist', who conducts 'a cost-benefit analysis' and 'measures his group's capabilities to sustain the effort.' The experience of terror thus produces a self-destructive irrationality in the audience. If terror is understood as dangerous precisely because it yields an irrational crowd, it seems plausible that the assumed norm would be the opposite; a rational individual, the singular symbolically-constituted subject that is the ideal of a phallic economy. Terror, it seems, is the sensation that unravels the phallically-formed subject.

This presumption becomes more explicit in the few instances where the experience of terror is actually examined in terrorism research. Berry provides us with five models of why terrorism would be successful, all expressed in terms of the response of an impersonal 'target', until we reach the last scenario, in which a lack of certainty 'in his or her convictions' (which remain unspecified) may lead the target to give in to terrorist demands. An unstable investment in one's culture, in other words, makes terror an efficacious emotion for the attackers. Flynn examines the victim's experience of terrorism without direct contact with the

¹⁸³ Michael Welch, *Scapegoats of September 11th: Hate Crimes and State Crimes in the War on Terror* (London; New Brunswick, NJ.: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 5.

¹⁸⁴ U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, *Combatting Terrorism*.

subjects themselves. Instead, he uses Weiss's notion of 'idiocide' to explain the sensation of terror:

There is a denial of status when an individual is brought down or kept from the position he normally or rightfully occupies, turning him into a victim . . . thereby making his promise meaningless . . . Where a loss in status precludes the carrying out of some role, a loss in stature affects an individual as a single unit. Starvation, torture and murder have it as an inescapable consequence. Indeed, every means of human destruction . . . is inevitably idiocidal, radically reducing the stature of an individual, making him less than a human can be and should be.¹⁸⁵

For Flynn and Weiss, then, the sensation of terror involves bringing the subject down, pulling them earthwards and out of the symbolic order as the vulnerability of the body is exploited. To be violently reminded of one's material nature makes the overtly male subject somehow less than human. The sensation of terror, thus, is understood as that which threatens the ideal of the phallically-constituted subject, attacking its conviction, its stature, and its individuality.

Nowhere does it become clearer that the terrorised subject constructed by our epistemology of terrorism is in its normative state the rational, singular, disembodied subject of the phallic-masculine than in the position women occupy within these discourses. This begins to manifest itself in the persistent and widespread linguistic tick when talking about the victims of terrorism, as studies and news reports qualify the numbers as "including X number of women and Y number of children." When terrorist atrocity targets civilian populations, and terrorism discourses themselves understand terror as that which arises in the masses, why is it that such qualifications are needed? The overt intent is frequently emotive, as Burleigh demonstrates when he tells us '[f]ive of the passengers were killed, including a young woman on her way to her wedding.'¹⁸⁶ Again, Schlesinger et al. argue that 'television like the press tends to focus on those victims who are most vulnerable and innocent: women, children and animals,'¹⁸⁷ in order to instil a sense of outrage at such violence in the audience. Yet the use of non-masculine subjects to engender emotional response is indicative of the fact that these subjects are in fact 'exceptions' that need locating within the narrative of terrorism. For as terrorism discourses install the phallic-masculine as the norm, the presence of others within terrorism becomes inexplicable. Indeed, their presence is emblematic of the obscenity of terrorist violence:

¹⁸⁵ Paul Weiss, 'Idiocide', *Evaluation and Change* Special Issue: Services for Victims/Survivors (1980): 3; cited in E. E. Flynn, 'Victims of Terrorism: Dimensions of the Victim Experience', in *Contemporary Research on Terrorism*, ed. Paul Wilkinson and A. M. Stewart (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1989), 342.

¹⁸⁶ Burleigh, *Blood*, 107.

¹⁸⁷ Schlesinger, Murdock, and Elliott, *Televising*, 42.

Like other warriors, terrorists recognized innocents – people not involved in conflict. Terrorists usually excluded women, children, and the elderly from target lists . . . By the early twentieth century, terrorists began to attack people previously considered innocents to generate political pressure.¹⁸⁸

The willingness to bring the non-masculine into terrorism marks the descent from warrior to monster. Installing the phallic-masculine as the normative subject thus produces a hierarchy of innocence, in which some subjects become even more illegitimate targets than others. Such a hierarchy implies that attacking the non-masculine is a particularly powerful strategy for disturbing the subjective norm, for producing symbolic consequences across a culture. By marking the non-masculine as innocent and out-of-bounds in legitimate violence, can we not read terrorism discourses as claiming this territory as their own? For as we have seen, the non-masculine subject/object is the very space that establishes the contours of the phallic-masculine subject. Terrorist violence exploits this dependence, targeting the non-masculine to challenge the phallic subject, appropriating the ground upon which the phallic symbolic rests for its own purposes. Thus, the epistemology of terrorism must view the non-masculine as an exceptional target, the illegitimate target of an already illegitimate violence, in order to repress the recognition that the phallic-subject relies absolutely on the appropriation of the non-phallic. In essence, as the phallic-masculine is posited as the terrorised subject, the non-masculine target becomes illegitimate twice-over to secure its primacy.

If the phallic symbolic renders the non-masculine as exceptional in order to stabilise its umbilical relation to the world, this suggests that the greatest threat to this stability will emerge when this repressed ground itself perpetrates the violence. To put it another way, it is when the non-masculine decides to exploit the forgotten flesh in order to bring about symbolic consequences that the phallic-masculine is put under greatest pressure. It is little wonder, then, that women's turn to terrorism comes to represent a particularly profane form of illegitimate violence:

Faced with a truly horrible terrorist act – a pretty young woman with a bomb strapped to her body walks into a crowd of happy teenagers waiting for a bus and blows herself and several other pretty young women into a bloody mass of gore – it is tempting to see terrorism as a manifestation of pure evil.¹⁸⁹

In a discourse concerned with defining and explaining the use of exceptional, illegitimate violence, women's aggression is somehow even more excessive, more problematic, more aberrant. As we shall explore in detail in Chapter 2, the exceptional status accorded to women's terrorism means that it is deemed as requiring special scrutiny, particular

¹⁸⁸ U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, *Combatting Terrorism*.

¹⁸⁹ Kronenwetter, *Terrorism*, 3.

explanation, an epistemology all of its own, as it cannot be accounted for in the normative modelling of the terrorist, or of women. Suffice to say for now, that Burleigh sums up the prevalent trend in the treatment of women's violence as he repeatedly characterises the female terrorist as someone 'who had followed her boyfriend . . . into terrorism,'¹⁹⁰ regardless of the specific historical or social context he is addressing. The figure of the female terrorist is always absorbed back into the phallic economy, as the influence of the men around her is brought to the fore. In this regard, the Suffragette movement becomes a conspicuous absence in terrorism studies. In their own historical moment, many of the actions taken by these women were considered terrorist, and yet the histories and case studies that make up terrorism studies rarely, if ever, make reference to their activities. This cannot simply be because we now read their cause as justified, for the anti-apartheid activities of the African National Congress in South Africa consistently appear across the discourse, testifying to the complexities of defining terrorism. Could it be, rather, that this forgetting is emblematic of the desire to leave women outside of terrorism discourses altogether?

The Ethical Interruption of Terrorism Discourses

The epistemology of terrorism, it seems, constructs the phallic-masculine as its *a priori* subject. Responses founded on such discourses will always work to maintain this ideal of subjectivity, meaning that when government and nations pursue counter-terrorist policies on behalf of their terrorised citizens, they simultaneously reinforce the security of the phallic-masculine. In a very real sense, the entire concept of terrorism relies on the phallic construction of masculinity. Terrorist violence is assumed to have symbolic power through its exploitation of the phallic's fleshy origins and the audience is presumed to be terrorised as they are taken to be representative of such a subjectivity. The concept of terrorism is therefore grounded in a phallic repression of the body. In this light, the absence of a scrutinised concept of terror is not an oversight: it is a necessity. If we read terrorism as the collision of the symbolic and its forgotten flesh, the idea that there is a universal experience of terror becomes impossible, for the phallic-masculine and the repressed feminine occupy different positions in relation to both. For an awful instant, the phallic-masculine becomes aware of its own missing body, while the feminine strains against its silence and feels its phallically-designated immanence. This is not to straightforwardly suggest that men and women will have specific, recognisable experiences of terror, but rather that our relationship to our bodies, which are by no means homogenous, plays a crucial part in how we experience terror. It is this possibility

¹⁹⁰ Burleigh, *Blood*, 241.

that is ruled out as we are merged into a terrorised audience, a merging that forecloses any recognition that, instead of being containers for our consciousness, we are in fact coincident with our bodies, that 'the boundary of the containing body might be skin, while passing through the mucous membranes, and through the body and the flesh.'¹⁹¹ The idea that our bodies are the means through which we perceive the world, and that the environment they inhabit will influence those perceptions threatens to undermine the very notion of terror and with it, terrorism. For if we acknowledge that those actions labelled as terrorist do not have a universal, uniform effect, it becomes impossible to produce even the most basic definition of terrorism – that which terrorises. Embodying the experience of terror unravels the concept of terrorism as something universally recognisable, dangerous, useful, and as such, questions the validity of elevating these actions to anything other than criminal. Forgetting the body and leaving the experience of terror unexamined becomes crucial in maintaining the integrity of the phallic subject, at both the level of the conscious and unconscious. Keeping the body at bay becomes pivotal in giving the symbolic and its institutions license to act against that which threatens it.

When attempting to formulate an ethical response to terrorism, we must therefore be careful not to replicate the disavowal of the body that facilitates the concept of terrorism. Any such forgetting of our materiality in favour of abstracted notions of identity risks remaining within the same conceptual framework, rather than providing us with an alternative approach. Arguably, it is this that leads Hegel into difficulties as he grapples with the implications of The Terror's bloody realisation of Enlightenment values in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. For Hegel, widely recognised as the first philosopher to tackle terrorism as we have come to understand it today,¹⁹² The Terror had its roots in the marriage of a Kantian morality that views thought as superior to the material and a utilitarian mode of thought that regards all consciousness as useful.¹⁹³ Such a match means there is nothing to prevent the use of violence in realising abstract ideals in concrete reality. As Kain notes, Hegel has a certain admiration for the French Revolution as a rational idea translated into a social reality,¹⁹⁴ yet the bloody nature of The Terror troubles him. He argues that this violence arose from the Revolution's grounding in Rousseau's ideal of a factionless, universal government, for demanding that each citizen put personal interest aside in the name of a universal good not only reduces the agency of

¹⁹¹ Irigaray, *Ethics*, 44.

¹⁹² See for example Eric van der Luft, 'Edgar Bauer and the Origins of the Theory of Terrorism', in *The New Hegelians: Politics and Philosophy in the Hegelian School*, ed. Douglas Moggach (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 136.

¹⁹³ Philip J. Kain, *Hegel and the Other: a Study of the Phenomenology of Spirit* (Albany, NY.: State University of New York Press, 2005), 179–180.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 189.

governance to the solely negative mode of disposing of those unwilling to make such a sacrifice, it simultaneously drains each individual life of meaning. For Hegel, then:

The sole work and deed of absolute freedom is therefore *death*, a death too which has no inner significance or filling, for what is negated is the empty point of the absolutely free self. It is the coldest and meanest of all deaths, with no more significance than cutting off a head of cabbage or swallowing a mouthful of water.¹⁹⁵

For Hegel, The Terror is the realisation of rational values without an awareness of the transcendental. To prevent the reduction of the meaning of the individual human life to nil, he argues for what van der Luft characterises as ‘the mediating influence or humanising counsel of deep faith.’¹⁹⁶ Faith in an absolute other comes to secure the significance of each individual life, as understanding ourselves as expressions of an absolute whole allows us to accept that each human life is working towards a universal good. Turning to the transcendental, then, becomes the means through which we prevent life becoming merely ‘useful’, while at the same time guaranteeing individual freedom.

This turn to the transcendental as guarantor explicitly mirrors the phallic turn away from its material origins to find its ideal reflected back in the face of God. Hegel does not seem to acknowledge that identification with an absolute other can facilitate the reduction of human life in much the same way as Rousseau’s social contract does in his eyes, for if the transcendental acts as guarantor, what is to prevent the colonising of that abstract space by a specific concept of the universal? Indeed, it is precisely the attempt to assert mastery over the transcendental that has characterised terrorism discourses in the twenty-first century. Thus it is perhaps no surprise that we find Habermas calling for ‘a *strict* universalism in which the same respect is demanded for everyone.’¹⁹⁷ Speaking in the months after the September 11th attacks, Habermas argues that rational progress towards a universal good is achieved by ensuring the participation of a multitude of voices in open dialogue. In such a dialogue ‘people must, step by step, widen their original perspectives, and ultimately bring them together.’¹⁹⁸ They do so by a process of ‘*mutual* perspective-taking’, whereby each one in turn becomes the speaker or the listener.¹⁹⁹ Through such an engagement, it is possible to ‘develop a common horizon of background assumptions in which both sides accomplish an interpretation that is not ethnocentrically adopted or converted but, rather, *intersubjectively* shared.’²⁰⁰ In other

¹⁹⁵ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 360. Italics in original.

¹⁹⁶ van der Luft, ‘Edgar Bauer’, 153.

¹⁹⁷ Habermas in Borradori, *Time of Terror*, 72. Italics in original.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 37.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

words, such a dialogue permits difference to be overwritten in favour of finding a universal set of values, which then become the horizon for all cultures. Habermas thus argues that terrorist violence arises as this communicative action fails or is no longer possible. As such, he locates the September 11th attacks as resulting from the crumbling of global communication. For Habermas, the speed of mass communication coincides with the shutting down of communicative action, the increasing disparity between the richest and poorest populations, and the rejection of modernity's cultural relativism by Islamic theocracies, producing an overall breakdown of worldwide communication. The only way to revive this collapsed communicative sphere, in Habermas' view, is to insist that every citizen in the West adheres to a constitution that installs a universal equality, so that minority voices can change the 'self-understanding' of the majority. Ultimately, Habermas calls for a universalism with the potential for a 'self-correcting learning process.'²⁰¹

For Habermas, overcoming violence is a matter of overwriting difference, as subject and other find a common horizon. Yet the possibility of establishing such a universal horizon works against the material reality of our bodies. It implies that we can – and should – overcome or forget physical difference, be it morphological, sexual, racial, as we strive to better humanity. Habermas' humanity is one that forgets its material nature once again. It is faith in the abstract, in the power of communication alone that secures the recognition of the minority, of the other. But as we have seen, relying on such abstraction facilitates the forgetting of the other. Habermas recognises this, and as such demands a stricter adherence the values of equality already present in our culture to ensure that the other's voice is heard. In this respect, Habermas mirrors the gesture of terrorism discourses, as he re-asserts the power of our current symbolic economy. Indeed, even his rhetoric demonstrates this shared ground, as his reading of terrorism is peppered with the conventional definitions and epistemological assumptions that we see in terrorism studies. Habermas' mutual horizon is thus always already colonised by the concept of equality, one that emerges from within our current culture. If recognition is guaranteed by the abstract, therefore, the other is always already constituted in terms that arise in our symbolic before we have even reached that horizon.

Habermas' approach thus remains within the logic of the culture in which he is trying to intervene. His ethical gesture constructs the space allotted for the other already present in our symbolic economy, as Irigaray argues:

If our hospitality confines itself to offering a place or a room for guests, it is because we are not yet able to do better. We offer to the other that which we unconsciously

²⁰¹ Ibid., 42.

reserve for ourselves: an enclosed space partly defined around a void. The place that we give to the other in fact amounts to a representation of the place that we ourselves occupy – a space apparently open in a closed world.²⁰²

Yet it is precisely such a horizon or space that we are attempting to open-up as we disrupt existing epistemological approaches, in order that the other can be heard. How do we ensure that we have not pre-figured this mutual horizon before we have encountered the other? For Irigaray, cultivating the understanding that we are all embodied subjects is the only means of securing such an ethical encounter. Becoming aware of both ourselves and others as corporeal subjects is to approach the other with the realisation '[f]or me, an incarnate subject, you are an incarnate subject.'²⁰³ By acknowledging that we are coincident with our bodies, we recognise that our perceptual horizons are limited and shaped by our materiality and as such, we can only know the world and the other through our bodies. Our bodies locate us in space and time in such a way that the possibility of colonising the other with projections of our own subjectivity is fundamentally undermined. Instead, when we meet with the other, we understand they are a "you who are not and will never be me or mine," you are transcendent to me in body and in words, in so far as you are an incarnation that cannot be appropriated by me, lest I should suffer the alienation of my freedom.'²⁰⁴ For Irigaray, then, it is the cultivation of material difference, not the disavowal of it, that opens up the possibility of an ethical encounter with the other. For as embodied subjects, the encounter is no longer constituted by abstract concepts, but is shaped by a metaphysics of 'reciprocity in touching-being touched', as each reaches out to the other with an awareness of their own limitations and the irreducibility of the other thanks to their corporeal nature. As Hirsh notes, this means that the meeting with the other always resembles the psychoanalytic encounter,²⁰⁵ for each subject speaks from their position in the world, and the other recognises that their words are imbued with meaning specific to that relation. By this exchange of terms, by listening to the meaning each word or gesture holds for the other, the two approach a mutual horizon, generating a new meaning between the two. Thus, to approach the other as incarnate becomes a process in which we 'find gestures or words which will touch the other in his, or her, alterity.'²⁰⁶

To meet with the other in an ethical way in Irigarayan terms, then, is to enact a radical suspension of preconceived ideas and meanings. In his analysis of the September 11th attacks,

²⁰² Luce Irigaray, *Sharing the World* (London; New York: Continuum, 2008), 23.

²⁰³ Irigaray, *Key Writings*, 21.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁰⁵ Elizabeth Hirsh, 'Back in Analysis: How to Do Things with Irigaray', in *Engaging with Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought*, ed. Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor, and Margaret Whitford, Gender and Culture (New York; Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1994), 285–315.

²⁰⁶ Irigaray, *Key Writings*, 29.

Derrida proposes a similarly radical ethical approach. He first argues that ‘the prevailing discourse, that of the media of the official rhetoric, relies too readily on received concepts like “war” and “terrorism”’,²⁰⁷ before moving on to suggest, like Žižek, that characterising the attacks as a ‘major event’ ignores the fact the possibility of such an atrocity was already within our culture’s horizon, as part of a systemic auto-immune perversity. Thus, he goes on to deconstruct the impressions of the event that the ‘organized information machine’ of the media, political rhetoric, and the language of terrorism discourses produce. The resulting analysis has clear parallels with the critique an Irigarayan reading of terrorism has produced thus far. Where a Derridian and Irigarayan approach diverge, however, is in the ethical interventions their work makes possible. Like Irigaray, Derrida questions our current conception of hospitality and tolerance, claiming that ‘[w]e offer hospitality only on the condition that the other follow our rules, our way of life, even our language, our culture, our political system, and so on.’²⁰⁸ This limited, regulated form of hospitality provides only a paternalistic, colonised space for the other and does amount to a meeting with the other. Rather, Derrida argues:

Pure and unconditional hospitality, hospitality *itself*, opens or is in advance open to someone who is neither expected nor invited, to whomever arrives as an absolutely foreign *visitor*, as a new *arrival*, nonidentifiable and unforeseeable, in short, wholly other.²⁰⁹

Pure hospitality thus involves laying oneself open to the absolutely other, rather than setting up the conditions for its arrival. It is therefore beyond the realms of legislation and discourse. But as Derrida notes, unless one is located within some form of symbolic system, such hospitality becomes impossible, for there would be nothing to lay open in the hospitable gesture:

I cannot open the door, I cannot expose myself to the coming of the other and offer him or her anything whatsoever without making this hospitality effective, without, in some concrete way, giving *something determinate*. This determination will thus have to re-inscribe the unconditional into certain conditions. Otherwise, it gives nothing.²¹⁰

Derrida thus leaves us with a paradoxical model of hospitality, a welcoming of the other that he is never sure can be ethical.

It is here we find the crucial difference between the ways in which Derrida and Irigaray formulate the radical welcoming of the other. For while Derrida envisages meeting the other

²⁰⁷ Derrida in Borradori, *Time of Terror*, 100.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 128.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 129 Italics in original.

²¹⁰ Ibid. Italics in original.

within some form of cultural system, Irigaray insists on the material reality of opening the door to meet them:

The place of the meeting cannot be merely ecstatic with respect to our real surroundings, nor can it reduce itself to a sensible immediacy. In the words that each tries to say to the other, or that are said of the other, the bodies and the earthly dwelling where they live must resonate. No word can reach the rhythm, even less the melody, allowing one to approach the other – outside oneself or within oneself – if it comes from an already existing discourse.²¹¹

The meeting with the other takes place in a specific context, and as such, when each suspends their preconceptions and pre-established meanings, it is this shared space that acts as the concrete determinant, preventing each subject reducing the other to their own terms. This pivotal difference between Derrida and Irigaray's ethical formulation arises thanks to Derrida's forgetting of the body. For Derrida, the other represents the irreducible horizon of our culture, identity, subjectivity, just as it does for Irigaray. But for Irigaray, our current culture does not even have access to such a horizon. Unlike Derrida, Irigaray argues there is no space for difference in our symbolic economy, thanks to the disavowal of sexual difference. For in a phallic symbolic, everything is always reduced to the logic of the same, the I and not-I, the positive and negative elements of a singular ideal. As such, our culture can only become capable of recognising difference if we first acknowledge the reality of sexual difference:

Not accepting and respecting this permanent duality between the two human subjects, the feminine one and the masculine one, amounts to preventing one of the two – historically the feminine – from attaining its own Being, and thus from taking charge of becoming what it already is and of the world to which it belongs, including as made up of other humans, similar or different.²¹²

By foreclosing the possibility of sexual difference, the phallic symbolic shuts down any recognition of difference, reducing all differences to its own terms. Thus, although some have questioned the primacy Irigaray places on sexual difference, as opposed to racial, cultural, class, religious differences, if one accepts that our symbolic is constituted by the phallus, it follows that our current concepts of these forms of difference are also phallically-constructed. Similarly, as Deutscher argues that as Irigaray addresses such differences, she demonstrates that 'sexual difference is not, per se, our cultural goal. Instead, our goal is a culture that values and lives well with difference . . . sexual difference takes on the status of the means to this

²¹¹ Irigaray, *Sharing*, 13.

²¹² Luce Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, trans. Heidi Bostic and Stephen Pluháček (London; New York: Continuum, 2002), 110.

end,²¹³ she inserts an artificial divide between Irigaray's earliest work on sexual difference and her more recent attempts to apply her insights to present-day contexts.

For it is only by fully recognising that human life is created thanks to sexual difference that we can acknowledge the role of the maternal body in engendering our subjectivity. Only by acknowledging the maternal world as the one we first inhabit are we able to embrace our material existence, and in doing so, become aware of the limits and obligations that such a physicality imposes on us. By recognising the irreducible difference between men and women, and actively cultivating our sexuate identities with respect for that difference, we do more than reduce both sexes to their biology. We develop a subjectivity, a means of expression, a relation to the world appropriate to each one, instead of submitting all to the logic of sameness. Man and woman have their own relationship to the world, and even to the divine through their own transcendental experience, and neither must reduce the other to the logic that is appropriate only to themselves. The cultivation of sexual difference inscribes our material presence in corresponding symbolics in such a way that that difference is preserved, allocating each subject a personal autonomy that means we no longer need to make use of the other, of the world, and even of nature, to mark the borders of our identities. As bodies inhabiting the world, the environment we cohabit comes to stand as a third difference, one in which we can meet the other as other:

It appears then that the real exists as at least three: a real corresponding to the masculine subject, a real corresponding to the feminine subject, and a real corresponding to their relation. These three reals thus each correspond to a world but these three worlds are in interaction. They never appear as proper in the sense of independent of each other. And when they claim to do this, they neglect one of the three reals, which distorts the whole.²¹⁴

In recognising and cultivating our incarnate identities and understanding that each subject has a specific relation to the world that cannot be reduced to our own terms, Irigaray argues that we reach what she describes as the sensible transcendental, for when we no longer make use of the other, transcendence is 'no longer ecstasy, leaving the self for an inaccessibly absolutely other, beyond sensibility, beyond the earth. It is respect for the other whom I will never be, who is transcendent to me and to whom I am transcendent.'²¹⁵ As embodied subjects, then, we become capable of overcoming the violence inherent in our present culture:

Between us a transcendence always subsists, not as an abstraction or a construct, a fabrication of the same to ground its origin or to measure its development, but as the

²¹³ Penelope Deutscher, *A Politics of Impossible Difference: The Later Work of Luce Irigaray* (Ithaca, NY.; London: Cornell University Press, 2002), 171.

²¹⁴ Irigaray, *Way of Love*, 111.

²¹⁵ Irigaray, *Key Writings*, 9.

resistance of a concrete and ideational identity. I will never be you, either in body or in thought.²¹⁶

It is through embracing our material presence and allowing each sex to cultivate a symbolic appropriate to its own relation to the world that difference can enter our culture without us colonising the space in which we meet with other. Moreover, it is by recognising the horizontal transcendence that exists between us, thanks to our irreducible subjectivity, that we can create a culture that no longer relies on the violence of the umbilical relation, on the reduction of the other and the material to a nourishing ground for our sense of identity. For once we have come to understand each other as irreducibly incarnate we can no longer reduce the other to our own stereotypes, reduce them to a representation within our symbolic: '[t]he other in us must remain flesh, living, moving. Not transformed into some idea, no matter how ideal. Not reduced to some sleep, more or less lethal.'²¹⁷ Cultivating the sensible transcendental, therefore, means the other is never again at our disposal.

Reading terrorism through Luce Irigaray suggests the failure to recognise the body and sexual difference constitutes the common ground between terrorism discourses and our philosophical attempts to formulate an ethical approach that can disrupt the cycle of violence. Yet Irigaray's ethics of the sensible transcendental is in itself problematic when we are considering terrorism. For Irigaray herself does not specifically address how such an approach will work when we are confronted by a hostile other. Moreover, if the body is precisely that which is exploited by terrorism, is there not a sense in which the terrorist is reading the other as incarnate? Similarly, if the body's presence is disavowed in terrorism studies because it threatens to unravel the symbolic's authority, does this not suggest that terrorism is a violent moment in which we become aware of ourselves as embodied subjects? Does this mean that an awareness of the sensible transcendental can be engendered through violence rather than in a mutual recognition of each other's irreducible presence? It is with these questions in mind that we turn to literary representations of terrorism, to examine the extent to which the cultural spaces in which we play with the umbilical ties between the symbolic and its grounding share or rethink the assumptions that allow terrorism discourses to unfold. Specifically, if it is the sexuate body that constitutes the forgotten ground of both terrorism discourses and our philosophical thinking, it is looking at the role of the body and of sexuate identity in literary figurings of terrorism that can perhaps help us critique our existing culture, opening up new possibilities for thinking about terrorism. In other words, can literary representations of the body help us formulate a way in which to cultivate Irigaray's sensible

²¹⁶ Ibid., 8.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 31.

transcendental in the face of violence? In order to begin to answer this question, it is first necessary to understand how the forgetting of difference situates women in relation to terrorism discourses, and it is to this we now turn.

Chapter 2: Embodying the Terrorist Other

Analysing terrorism discourses through an Irigarayan lens may have provided us with a neat means of accounting for the methodological quirks and conceptual quagmires that prevail throughout the discipline. But adopting an Irigarayan approach in order to reframe the concept of terrorism immediately presents us with two significant problems. Firstly, if our flesh-and-blood bodies are precisely that which terrorism exploits in order to induce symbolic consequences, does recognising ourselves as embodied subjects necessarily lead to a cessation of violence? Is there not a sense in which terrorism already understands us as embodied and makes use of that very fact? Secondly, if terrorism discourses are working to stabilise a phallic economy, does this not suggest that there will be very real repercussions for women as counter-terrorist policies start to take centre-stage in national and international politics? Have such repercussions actually manifested themselves in our daily life, or does their absence imply that such discourses imply that terrorism is in fact a gender-neutral concept?

A chorus of voices have already begun to address these questions, testifying to the damage inflicted on countless women's lives as a direct result of counter-terrorist actions and policies. Collections such as *Terror, Counter-Terror: Women Speak Out* bring together first-hand accounts from women across the globe, to illustrate that while the post-September 11th counter-terrorist policies clearly had the most brutal impact on the lives of women in Afghanistan and Iraq, there were economic, political, and ethical consequences for women everywhere.²¹⁸ Similarly, in works such as *W Stands for Women*, contributions from men and women describe how the Bush Administration merged gender politics and national security issues in such a way as to equate security with conservative sexual ideals.²¹⁹ But while these critiques analyse the political fall-out of September 11th, 2001, feminist author and journalist Susan Faludi was made aware that terrorism could be read as having a very specific connection to the status of women at home as well as abroad on the day itself. A few hours after the attacks, she received a call from a male journalist, who proclaimed in 'a bizarrely gleeful tone: "Well, this sure pushes feminism off the map!"'²²⁰ This was the first in a wave of media proclamations across the U.S. that stated the terrorist atrocities had 'sounded the death knell of feminism.'²²¹ As Faludi records:

²¹⁸ Ammu Joseph and Sharma Kalpana, eds., *Terror, Counter-Terror: Women Speak Out* (London; New York: Zed Books, 2003).

²¹⁹ Michael L. Ferguson and Lori J. Marso, eds., *W Stands for Women: How the George W Bush Presidency Shaped a New Politics of Gender* (Durham, NC.: Duke University Press, 2007).

²²⁰ Susan Faludi, *The Terror Dream: What 9/11 Revealed About America* (London: Atlantic Books, 2007), 20.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

In light of the national tragedy, the women's movement had proved itself, as we were variously informed, "parochial," "frivolous," and "an unaffordable luxury" that had now "met its Waterloo." The terrorist assault had levied "a blow to feminism," or, as a head-line on the op-ed of the *Houston Chronicle* pithily put it, "No Place for Feminist Victims in Post 9-11 America."²²²

"The feminist movement, already at a low ebb, has slid further into irrelevancy," syndicated columnist Cathy Young asserted. "Now that the peaceful life can no longer be guaranteed," military historian Martin van Creveld declared in *Newsday*, "one of the principal losers is likely to be feminism, which is based partly on the false belief that the average woman is as able to defend herself as the average man."²²²

For Faludi, these claims are part of a wider-reaching presumption that the rise of feminism and an attendant logic of equality have somehow rendered the U.S. vulnerable to terrorist attack, as society is gradually 'feminised.' Indeed, van Creveld's statement captures the sense in which feminism is innately connected to women's physicality and, as such, will confer the vulnerabilities of the female body onto those who embrace it. Thus, the logic goes that at a time when strength is required, feminism must dutifully fall to the wayside, a political brush-off Faludi describes as a "not now, honey, we're at war" attitude.²²³

What this outpouring of media opinion brings to the surface is an unarticulated supposition that feminism is a unified entity whose existence is secured by masculine might. Feminism is a privilege, a luxury, a frivolous notion that women are permitted to indulge in at times of peace, but must be willing to give up when a nation is required to take an aggressive stance in order to maintain that peace. In other words, a stable phallic economy is happy to accommodate feminism when it takes the form of a demand for universal equality. For Irigaray, this is because such demands enhance the overwriting of sexual difference, providing women with 'a chance to live freely' only insofar as they 'are forced to subject themselves to men's means of production and enhance their capital or sociocultural inheritance.'²²⁴ Indeed, Irigaray refuses to identify her work with the term "feminism", precisely because many feminist movements have taken the call for equality as the central aim. Moreover, Irigaray argues that once an interventional gesture has become an "-ism", its capacity to induce change becomes drastically limited, as it is reduced to a stereotype by the symbolic economy, a

²²² Ibid., 21.; Citing in order: Suzanne Fields, 'Yesterday's Laughs: Once Edgy, Now Cliche', *Washington Times* (Washington, April 25, 2002); Amy Holmes, 'Feminism Goes to Battle', *Washington Post* (Washington D.C., October 14, 2001); Kay Hymowitz, 'Why Feminism Is AWOL in Islam', *City Journal* Winter (2003); Philip Weiss, 'When It Comes to War, the Sexes Are Still Split', *The New York Observer* (New York, 2001); Manon McKinnon, 'No Place for Feminist Victims in Post 9-11 America', *Houston Chronicle*, December 10, 2001; Cathy Young, 'Feminism's Slide Since September 11', *Boston Globe* (Boston, Massachusetts, September 16, 2002); and Martin van Creveld, 'A New World Is Coming', *Newsday*, September 30, 2001.

²²³ Faludi, *Terror Dream*, 22.

²²⁴ Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous*, 78.

concept which can be readily defined and absorbed into its structure.²²⁵ The extent to which feminism had been rendered toothless when reduced to a stereotypical call for equality was revealed as the phallic economy came under attack. For as Faludi's book records, when people responded to the attacks by reaffirming the consistency and superiority of the culture that constitutes their subjectivity, it was the assumption that feminism claims men and women were equals that suddenly made it ridiculous. Faced with the spectacle of ferocious violence, it seemed that politics were defined by one's physical capacity to respond to such aggression. In this argument, women's bodies are explicitly inscribed as the non-masculine, the "less-than-ideal" subject, lacking the strength to respond defensively. To see feminism as anything other than a form of political pin-money, doled out to pampered women in a society protected and patrolled by male power is to delude oneself into thinking women are as physically capable of defending themselves as men. As such, the interventions feminism(s) make in political, social, and cultural spheres are dismissed as parochial and unimportant, as they are facilitated entirely by the masculine's guardianship.

Women's capacity to participate in any arena beyond their immediate context is thus explicitly limited by their own physicality, while the masculine is perceived as able to act in national and international spheres. Women and the feminine are explicitly positioned in a relation of immanence, thanks to their materiality, while the disembodied phallic-masculine transcends the limitations of his environment to engage with the world on a global level, be it through political discourse or military might. Moreover, these overarching global channels are seen as the vectors through which serious participation in the world takes place; the local and the located are dismissed as parochial. In essence, woman becomes a political irrelevance thanks to her non-phallic body, and she only achieves recognition insofar as she is willing to adopt the phallic identity as her own.²²⁶ The strange equation of the rise of terrorism with the decline of feminism that Faludi documents seems to suggest that calling for an embodied subjectivity as a means of articulating an alternative approach to terror risks consigning women to further immanence and irrelevance. Isn't the problem precisely that women are already understood as embodied subjects?

In this context, the figure of the female terrorist commands a particular fascination for terrorism discourses. As women engaged in violence that is specifically aimed to affect a wider audience, women terrorists present our cultural economy with a paradox: their bodies should align women with the silent ground that subtends the symbolic, and yet, they make use of the

²²⁵ Irigaray, *Conversations*, 74–75.

²²⁶ For a discussion of the transferable nature of the phallus, see Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (London; New York: Routledge, 2008), 57–91.

very materiality that should consign them to immanence. These are women willing to exploit the material world for their own ends, rather than accepting their position as representative of and coincident with that world. They are embodied subjects, donning the authority of the phallic-symbolic over the material and as such, present terrorism discourses with a unique problem: how does one assert the authority of the symbolic over the material, when the material itself is appropriating the authority of the symbolic? In this chapter, we first of all examine how the figure of the woman terrorist is dealt with in terrorism studies, as we critique the burgeoning field of 'women and terrorism' research that has come to prominence in the post-September 11th climate. Having established how the female terrorist is absorbed into the wider epistemology of terrorism, we then turn to two pre-September 11th novels, Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter* (1979) and Doris Lessing's *The Good Terrorist* (1985) in which women protagonists turn to some form of insurgency. As we shall see, in each of these novels, women's embodiment is rethought as a space of resistance, rather than a disabling immanence. This resistant space allows both Gordimer and Lessing to cast an ironic light on specific socio-historical contexts and to critique the appropriative logic that supports the epistemology of terrorism. By comparing these earlier figurings of the woman terrorist/freedom-fighter with the dominant modelling of the female terrorist today, we can ask what, if any, avenues of thought have been shut down in the contemporary moment? To put it another way, what happens to women's capacity to participate as subjects in the world around them when terrorism discourses enter the global arena?

An Epistemology of Female Violence

Despite the fact that terrorism studies ostensibly work to bring disparate acts of violence into a shared analytical framework, there is one class of perpetrator that is deemed as warranting classification as a subset within this epistemology. This is not a class defined by their political, religious, or ideological aims, by their methods, or by dint of a mutual geographical or even historical context. Somewhat paradoxically within a discourse that strives to ensure its principle object of study remains formless by repressing its material nature, women are considered as a specific type of terrorist within terrorism studies, by virtue of their sex alone. In the last decade, this subset has expanded rapidly, as a growing canon of books and articles exclusively address the issue of 'Women and Terrorism'.²²⁷ Indeed, this sense that

²²⁷ For example Luisella De Cataldo Neuburger and Tiziana Valentini, *Women and terrorism*, ed. Jo Campling, trans. Leo Michael Hughes (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1996); Margaret Gonzalez-Perez, *Women and Terrorism: Female Activity in Domestic and International Terror Groups* (London: Routledge, 2008); Cindy Ness, ed., *Female terrorism and militancy: agency, utility, and organization* (London: Routledge, 2008); Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry, eds., *Women, Gender, and Terrorism* (Athens, GA.;

women's participation in terrorism merits particular attention was encapsulated in 2005 as one of the leading journals in the field, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, dedicated a special issue to exploring women's terrorist and militant actions. Given that this is a publication devoted to research on different forms of violence and conflict, the ring-fencing of women's aggression in a special issue is indicative of its perceived exceptional status. Victor is not alone, then, when she tells us that the woman terrorist is 'a very special kind' of terrorist.²²⁸

Just how exceptional a creature the woman terrorist is becomes apparent when one realises that the terms 'male' and 'female' only enter the lexicon of terrorism's epistemology when her presence makes them necessary. For example, it is rare for terrorism studies to specify that they intend to look at men and terrorism, or at masculine militancy. As Brown argues in her critical analysis of how Muslim women's suicide terrorism is interpreted in Western discourses, 'men's participation in political violence is assumed and taken for granted'²²⁹ to the extent that terrorism and violence are implicitly associated with male actors. Similarly, in looking at the international legal ramifications of September 11th, 2001, Charlesworth and Chinkin note that when discussing terrorism, 'sex remains unexceptional and unmarked if it is the male sex' who has perpetrated the violence, as male violence is understood as the norm.²³⁰ The strength of this presumption comes to the fore in one of the rare instances in which a study places male and female terrorists alongside one another, Karen Jacques and Paul Taylor's article, 'Male and Female Suicide Bombers: Different Sexes, Different Reasons?'²³¹ While the title of the article suggests that Jacques and Taylor are investigating whether differences in motivation can be legitimately mapped onto different sexual identities, it immediately becomes apparent that what the study is actually doing is providing an account of 'the motivations and recruitment of female terrorists.'²³² They do so by 'comparing the female cases to data on the motivations of male suicide terrorists . . . to begin to build up a picture of the unique personal motivations of female suicide terrorists.'²³³ As such, their study

London: University of Georgia Press, 2011); Mia Bloom, *Bombshell: The Many Faces of Women Terrorists* (London: Hurst & Company, 2011) to mention but a few of the studies that explicitly refer to women and terrorism.

²²⁸ Barbara Victor, *Army of Roses: Inside the World of Palestinian Women Suicide Bombers* (London: Robinson, 2004), 18.

²²⁹ Katherine E. Brown, 'Blinded by the Explosion? Security and Resistance in Women's Suicide Terrorism', in *Women, Gender and Terrorism* (Athens, GA.; London: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 203.

²³⁰ H. Charlesworth and C. Chinkin, 'Sex, Gender, and September 11', *American Journal of International Law* 96 (2002): 602.

²³¹ Karen Jacques and Paul Taylor, 'Male and Female Suicide Bombers: Different Sexes, Different Reasons?', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 31, no. 4 (2008): 304–326.

²³² *Ibid.*, 304.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 306.

is structured by a series of hypotheses that explicitly locate female violence in relation to male violence:

Compared to males, females will less often be . . .²³⁴

Compared to males, females will be more . . .²³⁵

Even when Jacques and Taylor anticipate there will be no difference in behaviour between the sexes, it is still necessary to understand the female by drawing comparison with the male:

There will be no significant differences to the extent to which males and females are associated with . . .²³⁶

Thus, although they elsewhere state that ‘males and females are equally capable of aggressive behaviour. . . they show no difference in their aggressive behaviour following a frustrating event’,²³⁷ it is clear from the questions that ground their research and the structure of their hypotheses that the authors are working within an epistemological framework that equates violence with masculinity. In taking male violence as the yardstick against which to analyse the female, Jacques and Taylor are following in a cultural tradition. For as people such as Ward and Neuburger demonstrate legal and epistemological systems all over the world interpret women’s violent or criminal behaviour ‘as a deviation from dominant male norms; female criminality is therefore defined by sociologists as a subculture.’²³⁸

As Jacques and Taylor import explanations offered by existing material on (male) suicide bombings to construct an interpretative lens for female suicide attacks, they inadvertently unveil the gender bias present in the seemingly neutral terminology that permeates terrorism discourses. By bringing prior studies of apparently sexless individuals into contact with questions of gendered motivation, Jacques and Taylor accidentally reveal how frequently their predecessors have silently equated words such as “terrorist”, “individual”, “extremist”, “group/organisation” and “identity” with men and masculinity. When Jacques and Taylor consider the possibility of women’s involvement in terrorism, it becomes necessary to assign each of these terms with a gendered qualifier. It is only when women enter the narrative that sex and gender become crucial distinctions, necessary for understanding violent behaviour. It seems that women’s terrorist activity is the one instance in which the epistemology of terrorism deems the body as a vital category. Rajan’s analysis of

²³⁴ Ibid., 306, 309.

²³⁵ Ibid., 308, 310.

²³⁶ Ibid., 307, 309–310.

²³⁷ Ibid., 307.

²³⁸ De Cataldo Neuburger and Valentini, *Women*, 40; Ian Ward, *Law, Text, Terror* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 23, 95–122.

representations of female suicide bombers in cultures across the globe supports this, as she finds that '[w]omen bombers, by and large, are represented in ways that highlight them first and foremost as women, in line with common social ideologies about women.'²³⁹ Be it in the media, in terrorist propaganda, or in political and academic discourses about terrorism, to talk about women suicide bombers is to talk about female behaviour. The apparent necessity for taking sex into account to explain female actions goes beyond discussions of the suicide bomber, as Neuburger found in her examination of sociological and criminological studies:

Women . . . are determined by their biology. Their hormones, their reproductive role, necessarily determine their emotionality, childishness, deviousness, etc. These traits, in turn, characterise female crime. If crime can be explained in biological terms, any adequate explanation has to explain why female, but not male, biology determines deviant behaviour.²⁴⁰

It is perhaps no surprise, then, that the significance accorded to the body when women enter terrorism discourses is described in biological terms. 'Female' and 'male' describe the sexual characteristics of a subject or object, as opposed to the more nuanced, complex, and specifically human terms 'woman' and 'man.' Not only do the former carry connotations of 'natural', instinctual or animalistic behaviour in the context of explaining human action, they also allot the terrorist the status of a gendered object, rather than serving as a genuine recognition that the person under observation has a sexuate identity.

This suggests that although the body enters the epistemological framework when women complicate the gender stereotypes of violence, terrorism studies still does not recognise or engage with sexual difference. Instead, the epistemology of terror constructs sexed objects, male and female terrorists, and reads the actions of each object through a culturally-constituted lens. Therefore, Jacques and Taylor make manifest the cultural assumptions that permeate terrorism discourses when they take male violence as the normative baseline against which female violence is the exception. Moreover, their study alerts us to the fact that women's consignment to material immanence will cause problems for the epistemology of terrorism. For as Jacques and Taylor argue, whereas non-gendered studies of terrorism make claims such as 'an individual's psychological response to events and circumstances beyond their control' motivates suicide terrorism, once women are taken into consideration, such statements become impossible as they do not take into account an 'equally important cited reason for female engagement . . . exploitation, whereby an organization or individual takes advantage of an individual's specific circumstances to recruit a

²³⁹ V. G. Julie Rajan, *Women Suicide Bombers: Narratives of Violence* (London: Routledge, 2011), 2.

²⁴⁰ De Cataldo Neuburger and Valentini, *Women*, 33.

suicide bomber.²⁴¹ When the male terrorist is presumed to be the norm, the epistemology of terrorism takes it as a given that certain combinations of circumstances and strains will lead men to deploy violence, and thus terrorism studies dedicate themselves to dissecting the cocktail of societal, economic, ideological, and psychological factors that result in such an eruption. However, when women enter the fray, there is no longer a clear passage from intention to action. Something about women's terrorism resists and problematizes the explanations that account for the actions of their male counterparts. Rajan notes that this perceived resistance continues even when women suicide bombers have left testimonials articulating exactly 'why they are planning to implode themselves; what they think about their freedom struggles, the war, the enemy, and even the leadership of their rebel movements and cultures; and what they hope will come of their missions.'²⁴² For while the media, politicians, and terrorism researchers alike have little problem accepting that statements of intent released by terrorist organisations or individuals explain 'normal' terrorist violence, when women are involved, their words go unheeded. Instead, a woman's attack elicits a wave of explanatory narratives on all sides of a conflict:

Western nations tend to depict women bombers through common stereotypes of Third World women who are assumed to be victimized by Third World men and backward Third World cultures . . . In contrast, rebel nationalists produces images of women bombers to resonate with iconic cultural registers of femininity central to various anti-colonial nationalist movements in the colonial era, of women who sacrificed for and were loyal only to their cultures.²⁴³

Thus, while global politics in the last decade has been shaped by the understanding that Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda's statements explained their actions, it seems that women's violence engenders a tussle for meaning, as different cultures attempt to insert such actions into their own agendas. Connections between statement and intent are immediately viewed as problematic when a woman is behind the detonator.

Can we not read this desire to inscribe 'real' motivations onto the figure of the female terrorist as arising from women's culturally-designated state of immanence, her position as the fleshy other of the disembodied phallic-masculine? Understood as corresponding to phallic ideals of masculinity, the male terrorist is assumed to be accessible to the epistemological gaze. His material aggression is directed at bringing about change in the abstract, his motivations will correspond to abstract ideals, his subjectivity is reducible to the discrete categories of the epistemological framework. In a very real sense, the male terrorist is

²⁴¹ Jacques and Taylor, 'Different Reasons?', 306.

²⁴² Rajan, *Women suicide*, 2.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 3.

constructed as the Other of a legitimate masculinity. Read as occupying the other side of the binary, however, the female terrorist is understood as embodied, as having a surface, as a physical object. Therefore, much like Freud's dark continent and Lacan's feminine-as-lack, she eludes the epistemological eye, it perceives her as an opaque object, whose materiality means that she cannot be penetrated. Rendered blind to her inner-workings thanks to her body, the epistemology must then provide its own explanation of woman's actions, as it cannot discern the veracity of her claims by scrutinising their origins within her. The epistemology of terrorism thus reduces the woman terrorist to its construction of the female terrorist, ensuring her own words are 'eclipsed by the hegemony of *other* representations about [her] within the same cultural space.'²⁴⁴ The female terrorist is thus always already the other of the terrorist Other.

In a very real sense then, the woman terrorist is placed in a subaltern position within terrorism discourses, for as the other of the Other, she is located outside of the subject-Other binary and thus deprived of any capacity to act within that binary. Instead of her actions being understood in the terms she provides, the cultures around her inscribe her actions with terms they deem appropriate for her, inscriptions which Ness argues usually result in the 'the portrayal of the female militant/terrorist as either passive victim or feminist warrior.'²⁴⁵ So established is her subaltern status within the epistemology of terrorism that even research which aims to excavate the woman terrorist from this doubly-subjugated position cannot entirely shake off its logic. For indeed, most investigations that focus solely on women's participation in terrorism state the need to 'work past gender stereotypes and begin to examine the conditions that really influence female violence.'²⁴⁶ But as Bloom's statement suggests, while the intention in such studies is clearly to disrupt the overwriting of women's violence with cultural stereotypes, they converge with established convention in assuming that there are 'real' influences hidden behind each woman's action. Even studies which interview the women directly about the motivations behind their turn to terrorism and the causes their actions support rarely replicate the willingness of terrorism discourses to accept the male terrorist's words as an accurate account.

Jacques and Taylor's research is an interesting case in point. They are plainly aware of the impact of gender-stereotyping on other people's research and take steps to mitigate its effects in their own work. For example, they compensate for the fact that the majority of available data concerns male terrorism by creating a data set from information on 30 female and 30 male suicide bombers, unlike previous studies which include all available data.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 2.

²⁴⁵ Cindy Ness, 'Introduction', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 28, no. 5 (2005): 350.

²⁴⁶ Bloom, *Bombshell*, xi.

Similarly, they reject the claims of prior research that women are more vulnerable than men to exploitation by terrorists groups as they suffer psychological trauma as a consequence of rape or relatives' deaths. Jacques and Taylor argue instead that 'when men and women endure the same living conditions . . . it is reasonable to assume that they suffer the loss of a loved one to a similar extent,' and that 'both sexes are open to exploitation.'²⁴⁷ Furthermore, they resist the conventional wisdom that women's turn to terrorism is inherently connected to a demand for sexual equality or liberation, as 'the present data showed no instances of this occurring as a motivation and it is therefore not explored as a motivational category.'²⁴⁸ Jacques and Taylor are thus patently alert to the presence of victim and feminist militant stereotypes in research on women's violence. Yet despite this awareness, by taking male violence as the norm, Jacques and Taylor's study installs the presumption that female terrorism is exceptional within its epistemological framework, and as such, their research is obligated to find the 'real' reason behind women's violence, the distinctive trait that marks it as different to normal terrorism. From the outset of their article, it is plain where Jacques and Taylor presume this distinction to reside:

where there is arguably less understanding of female involvement [in terrorism] is the personal level. How are females persuaded or recruited into extremism? What motivates them into carrying out an act of suicide terrorism?²⁴⁹

Jacques and Taylor are not alone in presuming that the personal level is where women's violent activism becomes distinct from men's. As Victor sets out to interview the families, friends, and organisations connected to female suicide bombers, as well as failed suicide attackers, she tells us 'it was crucial to understand the social environment that pushes these young women over the edge of personal despair.'²⁵⁰ Skaine argues that as '[w]omen are shaped by their personal circumstance,'²⁵¹ we need an empathic, rather than purely historical, analytical approach to understand their actions.²⁵² Dearing claims that women suicide bombers are 'pressured by peers or driven by personal crisis,' although some 'are driven by what appear to be altruistic reasons.'²⁵³ In contrast, as Bloom examines the role women played in the Chechen takeover of the Dubrovka theatre in 2002, she stresses that they participated

²⁴⁷ Jacques and Taylor, 'Different Reasons?', 307.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 308.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 305.

²⁵⁰ Victor, *Army of Roses: Inside the World of Palestinian Women Suicide Bombers*, 7.

²⁵¹ Rosemarie Skaine, *Female Suicide Bombers* (Jefferson, NC.; London: McFarland, 2006), 41.

²⁵² Ibid., 2.

²⁵³ Matthew P. Dearing, 'Like Red Tulips at Springtime: Understanding the Absence of Female Martyrs in Afghanistan', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 33, no. 12 (2010): 1082.

'of their own free will but many had very personal motives for being there,'²⁵⁴ suggesting there is a necessary distinction between will and personal motivation.

Dearing's suspicion of the 'appearance' of women's motivations encapsulates the anxiety the figure of the female terrorist arouses within the epistemology of terrorism. As an embodied object, her motivations are never on open display, even when she tries to make her motivations explicit. The concept of the personal works to alleviate the anxiety her physicality causes, as it provides us with the epistemological tools to get beneath her obstinate skin. By locating woman's motivations within her, as arising out of her state of immanence, it becomes possible to use her body as a means of discovering her true intent. Understanding women's violence then becomes a process of interpreting her immanence, of unearthing personal histories to discover what brought about the recourse to terrorism. It is perhaps no surprise that such investigations repeatedly find deaths of family members and friends, rape and humiliation at the hands of occupying forces, and the traumatic witnessing of bloody violence in the lives of women who have turned to terrorism in conflict zones. Where no such violence exists, studies frequently find a charismatic male lover, a manipulative brother, or a woman who has failed to meet the demands made of her in a patriarchal society, because she has 'an inability to bear children or may be pregnant'²⁵⁵ or because of 'declining marriage prospects.'²⁵⁶ Rendered inscrutable by her embodied nature, women's motivations are instead found in her immediate surroundings, embedded in her domestic sphere.

This is not to suggest that investigating personal histories is not a legitimate means for understanding the decision to turn to terrorism. Rather, it throws into stark relief the ways in which the personal is absent from the discourses of male violence. For even as Jacques and Taylor argue that men and women are similarly afflicted by loss, they maintain that it is still possible to distinguish between the personal and the political:

Even women whose motivations for participation includes an ideological element are often found to hold dualistic personal and ideological motivations, rather than pure religious or nationalistic motives. Male motivations are more likely to be found in group membership . . . previous involvement in the conflict . . . and/or religious involvement . . . than personal involvement.²⁵⁷

As Jacques and Taylor attempt to categorise motivations as 'Religious/Nationalistic Reasons', responses to 'Key Events', 'Revenge' and 'Personal', they bring to the fore the notions of

²⁵⁴ Bloom, *Bombshell*, 62.

²⁵⁵ Skaine, *Female Suicide*, 41.

²⁵⁶ Robert A Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005), 209; These 'causes' appear across the spectrum of sympathies, in research that aims to challenge stereotypes such as Bloom, *Bombshell*; Victor, *Army of Roses: Inside the World of Palestinian Women Suicide Bombers*; through to studies that endorse them such as Burleigh, *Blood*.

²⁵⁷ Jacques and Taylor, 'Different Reasons?', 308.

personal and political or pure motivations that permeate the discourses around terrorism. As they try to impose distinctions on the psychological responses to key events, the desire to avenge the death of a loved one, and personal motivations, Jacques and Taylor are attempting to draw a categorical divide between the personal and the political. Given that anger, despair, frustration, and trauma arguably permeate all these categories, what is it that constitutes a personal motivation? According to Jacques and Taylor, the personal involves low self-esteem, depression, isolation from society, shame and dishonour, and monetary problems.²⁵⁸ In other words, the personal consists of unhappiness within one's immediate environment, rather than displeasure with the wider world. But what is it that makes this category of unhappiness somehow applicable to women but not to men? How is it that men can suffer the loss of a loved one and still be seen to have "pure" ideological intent, while for a women, the same loss renders her actions at best, an anomalous hybrid of impetus, and at worst, "purely" personal?

The answer lies in the fact that all such investigations rely on linguistic and textual sources to unveil the truth behind terrorist action. While Jacques and Taylor are as aware as Rajan that different cultures represent women's terrorism in terms that coincide with their own stereotypes of femininity,²⁵⁹ their study mirrors the gesture of all such research in failing to recognise that individual subjects will similarly represent the world in their own terms. The possibility that, when explaining their actions in terms of nationalist feeling or family history, different subjects could in some way be describing the same motivation escapes the mechanisms of such studies. The epistemology of terrorism fails to acknowledge the findings of psychoanalytic and sociolinguistic research, findings that Irigaray's own research supports, namely that '[m]an and woman do not generate language and structure discourses in the same way.'²⁶⁰ Irigaray's analysis, in fact, anticipates the findings of research that concentrates on unearthing women's motivations through their own testimonies and those of their immediate circle. For as we saw in Chapter 1, Irigaray posits that women speak in relational terms, from their own position in the present moment, addressing themselves directly to another subject. Men, on the other hand, take themselves to be the speaking subject, not addressing themselves to anyone in particular, and relate themselves to objects or abstract ideas associated with masculinity. For women, deprived of their own symbolic and positioned outside of the phallic economy, to speak in a phallic tongue is always a process of reaching out to a listener from a position of immanence while, for men, language is a means of establishing

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Although curiously, they argue that Arab media is 'freer' of gender stereotypes. Ibid., 311.

²⁶⁰ Irigaray, *Key Writings*, 35.

their place in the world as a whole.²⁶¹ It is perhaps little wonder then, that research into female terrorism consistently finds that ‘males were found to be more often motivated by religious/nationalistic factors compared to females, whereas females cited more revenge motivations and more personal reasons than men.’²⁶² These conclusions rest entirely on the forgetting of difference, on the presumption that all subjects have equal, universal access to systems of representation. It is only such *a priori* assumptions that allow any deviation or difference in the language used to be read as indicative of an intentional production of meaning.

This is the key to why women’s violence in particular is vulnerable to ideological or cultural manipulation. For while authors such as Rajan, Neuburger, and Gonzalez-Perez have explored in detail the ways in which patriarchal cultures produce readings of women’s aggression that ‘support specific (often conservative) cultural ideologies about women,’²⁶³ they cannot account for what it is in women’s violent action that makes it so open to such appropriation. Neither can they explain why academic attempts that strive to dislodge these conservative stereotypes inevitably regurgitate them as the personal enters the epistemology of female terrorism. Thanks to her subaltern position within the discourse, a woman’s voice is heard but not listened to in a manner that acknowledges her specificity as a subject. Instead, her relation language is appropriated, inserted into pre-established notions of female embodiment, and thus heard as articulating ‘personal’ intent. Thus, when she tells us that the death of a loved one led her join a terrorist organisation, there is no recognition in interpretations of her actions that this loss is connected to the suffering of a community at large. It is precisely this disavowal of difference and stripping away of language’s capacity to express a multitude of meanings that supports the epistemological exploration of terrorist motivations. Just as women’s relation language is read as indicating that she should be understood in personal terms, so men’s turn to the abstract is construed as providing the terms in which their actions should be framed. Therefore, whether in the guise of the gender-neutral ‘terrorist’ or considered specifically as a male terrorist, his psychological influences are considered, but never in isolation, instead being contextualised by political, economic, social, and educational factors. Poverty, disenfranchisement, and a sense that one’s identity and status have been maligned are seen as factors leading the gender-neutral terrorist to redress this assault on their identity by turning to the ‘compelling collective identities’ offered by

²⁶¹ See for example ‘Part II, Linguistics’ in *ibid.*, 35–96 or ; Irigaray, *To Speak Is Never*.

²⁶² Jacques and Taylor, ‘Different Reasons?’, 321.

²⁶³ Rajan, *Women suicide*, 4.

terrorist organisations,²⁶⁴ but these motivations are never read as ‘personal’. It seems that the epistemology of terrorism follows gendered lines as it tries to draw distinctions between talking about one’s family and ethnic or nationalistic motives, referring to one’s immediate social sphere and cultural ideologies at large, between describing personal pain and testifying to the suffering of society as a whole. Yet again, we find a loop between the terrorist object and the framework in which it is understood. The reliance on the words used by the terrorists themselves to designate motivational categories combines with the epistemological modelling of these categories as somehow ‘primary’ and ‘secondary,’²⁶⁵ making manifest terrorism discourses’ faith in the symbolic’s capacity to convey discrete, concrete meaning. For it is only by assuming that the words of the terrorist mean what they say that the epistemology can claim access to their motives. Moreover, it is only by thus asserting that the terrorist always has a clear and lucid purpose behind their violence that the epistemology can justify its existence, for as we have seen, it is the symbolic intentions of terrorism that make it more exceptional than murder.

The figure of the female terrorist is therefore doubly problematic for terrorism discourses. Not only does she represent the repressed maternal-material turning on itself, her state of immanence blurs the lines epistemology necessarily draws between personal and ideological intent. By bringing the body into a discourse that works to disavow our materiality, she carries the possibility that personal unhappiness lies behind the abstract rhetoric of ideological, nationalistic, or religious justifications. Such a possibility would demand an empathetic approach to terrorism, an empathy we have already seen is strictly tabooed. Similarly, the female terrorist threatens to undermine the concept of terrorism itself, for it is the absence of emotional motivation that secures the distinction between terrorism and murder. Therefore, it becomes vital that the “personal “ is established as a category peculiar to women alone. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the rapidly expanding library of studies that concentrate on the female suicide bomber. While women have been involved in militant organisation even before the term “terrorism” came into existence, the female suicide bomber commands a particular fascination for modern research; the number of pages dedicated to her far outweigh the instances of such attacks. For it is here that our notions of the emotional and the ideological seem to converge; when an individual chooses to end their own life in order to deliver a blow to the world around them, how can we draw a distinction between a pathological unhappiness that leads one to end one’s life and the pure, ideological intent that

²⁶⁴ Jacques and Taylor, ‘Different Reasons?’, 306.

²⁶⁵ See for example Cindy Ness, ‘In the Name of the Cause: Women’s Work in Secular and Religious Terrorism’, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 28, no. 5 (September 2005): 353–373.

the notion of terrorism relies on? Again, the epistemology of terrorism falls back on the words of the terrorist to secure this distinction. Terrorism studies separate suicide terrorism into the 'altruistic' and the 'fatalistic' acts,²⁶⁶ with the former being motivated by ideological motives, the latter resulting from personal reasons. Thanks to their relational language and the need to read women through their bodies, it is no surprise that Jacques and Taylor conclude that female suicide terrorism is nearly always fatalistic.²⁶⁷ This is the overwhelming trend in research into women's suicide terrorism: while male suicide bombers are understood to be making an ideological statement, female suicide bombers are read as committing suicide, as 'proactively seeking a way to end their lives.'²⁶⁸ Not only is her violence rooted in pain, her death is simply an expression of that pain, disconnected from broader contextual factors and symbolic intent. Her decision to become a suicide bomber is thus a testament to her pathology, not her commitment to a cause.

The pathology of the female suicide bomber is the most overt manifestation of the pathology assumed to lie behind all female violence. For when women, 'who are the bearers of life . . . are turned into killing machines,'²⁶⁹ they are read as deviating from an infinitely-tolerant feminine norm. The fact that they alone among the female population have resorted to violence suggests that these women are uniquely unable to cope with the conditions around them. For a woman to eschew the natural tolerance and passivity of femininity, for her to forget 'that women are apolitical [and] . . . that women's primary purpose and function is to be a mother and a wife rather than having an individual identity of her own,'²⁷⁰ something extraordinary must have occurred. By designating her motivations as personal, the epistemology of terrorism suggests that this aberration lies within each female terrorist: it is her vulnerability to her own emotional states that leads the individual woman to violence. At the mercy of her emotions, the female terrorist is therefore never quite the master of her own actions. Instead, terrorist 'organizations attempt to exploit'²⁷¹ her suicidal desires, decide to 'use female suicide bombers',²⁷² or more generally 'to make use of women.'²⁷³ Even as Bloom argues that the Chechnyan Black Widows 'go to their deaths voluntarily', she installs the logic

²⁶⁶ See for example Jacques and Taylor, 'Different Reasons?'; Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*; Dearing, 'Red Tulips'; Skaine, *Female Suicide*.

²⁶⁷ Jacques and Taylor, 'Different Reasons?', 321.

²⁶⁸ Dearing, 'Red Tulips', 1082.

²⁶⁹ Christopher Dickey in the foreword to Victor, *Army of Roses: Inside the World of Palestinian Women Suicide Bombers*, viii.

²⁷⁰ S.N. Herman, 'The Gender Dimensions of Terrorism: Women and Terrorism: Keynote Address', *Women's Rights Law Reporter* 31 (2010): 261–2.

²⁷¹ Dearing, 'Red Tulips', 1082.

²⁷² Skaine, *Female Suicide*, 49.

²⁷³ Anne Speckhard, 'The Emergence of Female Suicide Terrorists', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 31, no. 11 (2008): 1001.

of the use made of women's emotional vulnerability for, as a 'result of the stress from the war, women are highly impressionable and readily convinced to carry out a suicide mission.'²⁷⁴ The problematic presence of women's terrorism is thus accounted for within the epistemology through the logic of use as her personal pathology renders her useful to the terrorist Other. The woman terrorist's pain is absorbed into the grand narratives of ideological motivation, as she becomes the pathological female terrorist, a 'resource'²⁷⁵ for proper terrorist activity.

As such, epistemological constructions of female violence echoes the claims that feminism became irrelevant once the September 11th attacks reset the global political agenda. This connection becomes explicit when the presence of women in terrorist organisations puts feminism under the epistemic lens. Increasingly, the roles assigned to women within terrorist organisations are used as a means of vilifying the group. Organisations that state women are considered 'equal' within a movement are criticised as being 'not entirely able to divest themselves of the widely held beliefs about gender embedded in the culture surrounding them',²⁷⁶ while groups that exclude women because they 'belong in the crib and kitchen'²⁷⁷ are scorned for their sexism. Cook and others concentrate on women's presence in conservative Islamic movements to discredit the groups' actions, by accusing them of hypocrisy, sexism, and a willingness to abuse women.²⁷⁸ Much as the Bush administration cloaked its invasion of Afghanistan in the rhetoric of women's rights, terrorism studies reduces feminism to a demand for equal rights in order to pillory terrorist organisations for failing to provide 'equal opportunities', holding such groups to higher standards of equality than is present in the surrounding societies. This appropriation of feminist rhetoric means feminism is no longer about recognising women's subjectivity; instead, it becomes a tool for distinguishing between enlightened and deviant masculinities, as the terrorist is exposed as a perpetual misogynist. Much as the terrorist Other uses the female terrorist, so her presence is used by terrorism discourses to undermine this Other's legitimacy. Moreover, not only is the female terrorist the exploited emotional other of a hypocritical misogynistic Other, if she herself espouses feminist beliefs or calls for equality, it is a 'misguided feminist movement'²⁷⁹ which has rendered her vulnerable to such manipulation. Feminist ideals and fantasies of equality coalesce with women's natural emotional instability in such a way as to leave her dangerously open to the aims of the terrorist Other. When Jacques and Taylor choose to tackle and dismiss feminism as

²⁷⁴ Bloom, *Bombshell*, 65–66.

²⁷⁵ Ness, 'In the Name', 361.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 355.

²⁷⁷ Burleigh, *Blood*, 393.

²⁷⁸ David Cook, 'Women Fighting in Jihad?', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 28, no. 5 (September 2005): 375–384.

²⁷⁹ Victor, *Army of Roses: Inside the World of Palestinian Women Suicide Bombers*, 7.

motivation for militancy within the 'Personal' category,²⁸⁰ their decision is emblematic of the way in which feminism is collapsed into the personal in terrorism discourses as a whole. The possibility that feminisms could provide ideological, political, and revolutionary motivations is rarely recognised within these discourses, even when researchers such as Cunningham and Gonzalez-Perez have discovered that women are more likely to be involved in militant action that directly addresses their status as civilians.²⁸¹ Hence, not only does the epistemology of female violence reduce feminism to a personal rather than an ideological agenda, it inflects feminism with pathological overtones; it becomes an ethos which leaves women vulnerable and dangerously deluded.

While critics such as Brown rightly argue that we need to excavate women's terrorism from its subaltern position in order to become capable of responding to their violence, in asking how our own culture is terrorist, we need to ask what the subaltern status of the female terrorist means within our own culture. Returning again to Spivak's epistemological master, we need to ask how the norms installed by our approach to terrorism impact on our own sense of subjectivity. For instance, Nacos eloquently illustrates that women's political agency in the West suffers from being translated in the same way as women's terrorist violence. Just like the female terrorist, the female politician is always connected to her body, always imbued with a personal agenda.²⁸² It seems that when a woman makes a foray into the abstract political and ideological spheres, her body marks her attempts as ironic, for it testifies to a personal intent that is inconsistent with her overt purpose. So prevalent is this irony that even as women try to articulate an alternative politics, a new ideology in the guise of feminism, this is undermined by the very body that necessitates its existence. Embodied subjectivity, it seems, is ultimately what leaves woman without the capacity to act in the symbolic, as her materiality brings her politics into proximity with the pathological. But the division between the personal and the political is in fact inscribed on her body precisely to prevent it entering into the symbolic. What happens when we move beyond the sphere of terrorism studies and political rhetoric about terror? Is the female body still read as a depoliticising presence or does woman's materiality become a site of resistance, a space that resists this process of symbolic inscription? Does cultivating woman's materiality in fact constitute a radical overcoming of the boundaries between the ideological and the personal in such a way that the two are no longer read as

²⁸⁰ Jacques and Taylor, 'Different Reasons?', 308.

²⁸¹ Karla J. Cunningham, 'Cross-Regional Trends in Female Terrorism', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 26, no. 3 (2003): 171–195; Gonzalez-Perez, *Women*.

²⁸² Brigitte Nacos, 'The Portrayal of Female Terrorists in the Media: Similar Framing Patterns in the News Coverage of Women in Politics and in Terrorism', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 28, no. 5 (September 2005): 435–451.

inconsistent, but instead are somehow inextricably connected? As we turn to two literary representations of women involved in terrorist or freedom-fighting activities, I suggest that it is not a coincidence that both Nadine Gordimer and Doris Lessing choose women as the protagonists in their texts. As we shall see, both authors cultivate women's material immanence as a means of producing a radical critique of the specific socio-historical context around them.

Both Nadine Gordimer and Doris Lessing's politics were forged as they witnessed the disastrous effects of colonial rule in Africa. Living in South Africa and Southern Rhodesia respectively, these women saw first-hand the consequences of a politics and culture based in an epistemology that used the body as means for defining the subject. But if the colonial and South African authorities used skin as marker to distinguish legitimate subject from a sub-human other, their epistemological constructions did not necessarily permeate through the white and black skins and colonise the interior world of those under the regime. Hence, while the authorities claimed to be able to delineate a divide between white and black, legitimate and illegitimate, good and bad, the experience of living under this epistemological regime served to undermine the possibility of making such distinctions. Throughout their oeuvre, Gordimer and Lessing have repeatedly examined how the idiosyncrasies of the individual contradict and complicate the claims of the political, writing against the validity of substituting the epistemological construct for the living subject in the political sphere. Yet both authors suggest the individual's capacity for resisting such epistemic appropriation is so radical as to prevent the possibility of the subject being absorbed into any grand narrative, even if they chose to associate themselves with a particular approach.²⁸³ Writing against systems of power that appropriate the individual's body to inscribe their own interpretation, Gordimer and Lessing effectively undermine the ability to impose divisions and categories on the body that terrorism studies rely on in order to proclaim that they know the terrorist. How, then, do Gordimer and Lessing figure the female terrorist, and can their representations illuminate possibilities that the epistemology of terrorism has cast into the shadows? Moreover, as the vast majority of research on women and terrorism has been produced after September 11th, 2001, can examining novels written in and addressing contexts prior to the attacks help us expose what has been foreclosed in terrorism discourses in their aftermath?

²⁸³ See for example Hillela's problematic elusiveness in Nadine Gordimer, *A Sport of Nature* (London: Penguin Books, 1988) and Anna's troubled relationship with communism in; Doris Lessing, *The Golden Notebook* (London: Harper Perennial, 2007).

Resistant Skins and the Politics of Irony in Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter* and Doris Lessing's *The Good Terrorist*

Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter* (1979) and Lessing's *The Good Terrorist* (1985) place the figure of the would-be terrorist or freedom-fighter in hugely different contexts. *Burger's Daughter* traces Rosa Burger's attempts to locate herself within one of the myriad political narratives that circulated in apartheid South Africa. More specifically, Gordimer shows Rosa struggling with her personal heritage at the precise moment that Black Consciousness has come to the fore in the anti-apartheid movement. Rosa has been thrust into the political sphere thanks to the anti-apartheid and communist activism of her parents. After her father, Lionel Burger, dies as a political prisoner, all eyes turn to Rosa to see if she will take up his legacy. While the friends, officials, and activists around her read her as variously inherently activist, a potential insurgent, a spoilt white girl, or simply as a woman, Rosa's movements through South African society leave her disillusioned about her ability to embrace any of these roles fully. She escapes to Europe, only to return months later and embrace the role her genealogy had seemingly assigned her. By contrast, Lessing's *The Good Terrorist* is set in what is recognisably Margaret Thatcher's Britain and follows the life of a communist squat in North London through the eyes of Alice Mellings. While Alice works tirelessly to turn the squat into something resembling a middle-class home, her comrades are more concerned with the move from political rhetoric to terrorist violence. Rejected as potential recruits by both the IRA and the mysterious Soviets, the commune embark on a farcical campaign of their own, devoid of political intent and yet with bloody results. Despite these very different settings, both texts are united by the ironic tone that pervades them, an irony that has proved deeply problematic for readers and critics, as we shall see, not least because this tone prevents the easy transition from the novel's prose to the author's political comment. This frustration with the author's refusal to articulate a clear political stance is heightened by the very fact that Gordimer and Lessing have taken pains to situate their work in recognisable socio-historical contexts. What I want to suggest is that this irony is in itself the political gesture Gordimer and Lessing make, and that fundamentally it is the body of the woman classed as "terrorist" from which this gesture emerges.

Indeed, the history of *Burger's Daughter* as a text is testament to this very possibility. As Clingman and others have demonstrated, *Burger's Daughter* is a deeply intertextual novel, peppered with extracts from and references to non-fictional, philosophical, and literary texts. But as Barrett argues, it is the presence of the non-fictional references in particular that makes Gordimer's intertextuality more than a Gennettian comparative gesture. A pamphlet from the

Soweto Students Representative Council is reprinted in full; Stephen Biko's reworking of Hegel as the basis for Black Consciousness is given voice by Duma Dhladhla; and Clingman detects Joe Slovo's 1976 essay 'South Africa – No Middle Road' as an underlying presence throughout the novel.²⁸⁴ Unmarked quotes from Marx, Lenin, and communist thinkers dot the prose. Moreover, Lionel Burger is explicitly modelled on the real-life activist Bram Fischer sharing not only his history, but also using Fischer's own testimony before the court in his own trial.²⁸⁵ For Barrett and Clingman, such intertextuality creates 'a bridge between fact and fiction',²⁸⁶ vital in the context of apartheid South Africa, where texts, political groups, and specific people like Biko, Slovo, and Fischer were banned: '[t]he aim of using intertextuality was . . . to disseminate ideas, to encourage people to think and thereby to lead them to question the status quo.'²⁸⁷ Intertextuality allowed Gordimer not only to draw insightful comparison, then, it allowed her to integrate prohibited words so they could circulate among a wider audience.

Yet *Burger's Daughter* was initially banned by the South African Directorate of Publications. In a move that Gordimer has argued was designed to demonstrate the regime's open-mindedness to the wider world, the Director himself appealed against the ban his own committee had instituted.²⁸⁸ For Gordimer, this was an empty gesture, accorded only to white South African authors who had achieved international renown. The appeal solicited a series of reports which investigated what the book was about and which were subsequently published once the ban was overturned. The committee concluded not only that *Burger's Daughter* would 'hold the interest and attention of few other than the "dedicated"',²⁸⁹ but that it was safe to publish because it was "'[v]ery badly written.'"²⁹⁰ The critical reception of the book seemed to concur, for whereas satire highlights the failings of individuals or cultures to live up to their espoused ideals, irony points out the inconsistencies alone, leaving the reader without a sense of where the moral high ground is situated. Therefore, as Smith notes, Gordimer's use of irony left readers without a clear sense of 'who is being got at', and thus produced a novel that was 'too ambiguous, too elusive, in a context in which there can be no deviation from

²⁸⁴ Stephen R. Clingman, 'The Subject of Revolution', in *Nadine Gordimer's Burger's Daughter: A Casebook* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 69–70.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 57.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 57.

²⁸⁷ Susan Barrett, "'What I Say Will Not Be Understood': Intertextuality as a Subversive Force in Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter*.", *E-rea*, no. 2.1, La Citation à L'œuvre (June 15, 2004): 116, <http://erea.revues.org/491>.

²⁸⁸ Nadine Gordimer, *What Happened to Burgers' Daughter or How South African Censorship Works* (Emmarentia: Taurus, 1980), 1.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁹⁰ Chairman of the appeal board J.H. Snyman quote in the newspaper after the ban was lifted, cited in *ibid.*, 2.

service in the cause of liberation.²⁹¹ Yet the absence of an overt moral high ground gave Gordimer's novel a form of plausible deniability, as she put all South African politics under scrutiny, not simply the apartheid regime. Coupled with Gordimer's white skin, irony became the means through which Gordimer could slip banned material past the censors and into the world.

The Good Terrorist provoked a similar frustrated bafflement in its initial critical reception. Like Gordimer, Lessing situates her novel in a specific political and historical moment: the unions' struggles against Thatcher's policies, the Socialist movement's anxious relationship to Soviet Russia, and the Irish Republican Army's (IRA) terrorist campaign on mainland Britain are all present within the text. Again, given the specificity of the novel's context, critics found Lessing's ironic style confusing at best, particularly as they read the novel in light of Lessing's well-established leftist politics. Greene speaks for many when she writes that what she found 'horrific about [*The Good Terrorist*] is the way in which Lessing seems to turn on her own former beliefs in a mood of savage caricature.'²⁹² Less sympathetic critics read Lessing as committing 'a libel on hippies'²⁹³ or launching 'an old radical's revenge on the new radicals',²⁹⁴ frequently interpreting Alice's mother, Dorothy, as a serving as mouthpiece for Lessing's own new-found conservatism.²⁹⁵ But Lessing herself has stated that she was inspired to write *The Good Terrorist* by the media coverage of the car-bombing of Harrods in London on 17th December, 1983: 'The immediate thing was the Harrods bombing . . . Here the media reported it to sound as if it was the work of amateurs. I started to think, what kind of amateurs could they be?'²⁹⁶

Carried out by the Provisional IRA, this attack was simultaneously claimed and disowned by the IRA Council as an unauthorised attack in a statement released the day after the bombing:

The Irish Republican Army has been operational in Britain throughout last week. Our volunteers planted the bomb outside Woolwich barracks and in the car outside Harrods store. The Harrods operation was not authorised by the Irish Republican

²⁹¹ Rowland Smith, 'Black and White in Grey: Irony and Judgement in Gordimer's Fiction', in *The Later Fiction of Nadine Gordimer*, ed. Bruce King (Basingstoke; London: Macmillan Press, 1993), 45–46.

²⁹² Gayle Greene, *Doris Lessing: The Poetics of Change* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), 205.

²⁹³ Denis Donoghue, 'Alice, The Radical Homemaker', *The New York Times* (September 22, 1985), paragraph 6, <http://www.nytimes.com/books/99/01/10/specials/lessing-terrorist.html?scp=3&sq=denis%20donoghue%201985&st=cse>.

²⁹⁴ Walter Goodman, 'Books of the Times', *The New York Times* (New York, September 17, 1985), <http://www.nytimes.com/1985/09/17/books/books-of-the-times-007930.html>.

²⁹⁵ Claire Sprague, *Rereading Doris Lessing: Narrative Patterns of Doubling and Repetition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 13.

²⁹⁶ 'Time out for Realism' interview with Caryn James, published as part of Donoghue, 'Radical Homemaker'.

Army. We have taken immediate steps to ensure there will be no repetition of this type of operation again . . . We regret the civilian casualties, even though our expression of sympathy will be dismissed. Finally, we remind the British Government that as long as they maintain control of any part of Ireland then the Irish Republican Army will continue to operate in Britain until the Irish people are left in peace to decide their own future.²⁹⁷

Claiming and denying involvement, assuring the public it won't happen again at the same time as restating its intentions to continue militant action, the IRA's statement was rife with contradiction. But so was the government's response, as the then British Home Secretary Leon Brittan commented that '[t]he nature of a terrorist organisation is that those in it are not under disciplined control.'²⁹⁸ If the terrorist organisation is inherently disorganised, one is left wondering in what sense it can be deemed an organisation at all, or what it would mean to be organised? The responses of all parties to Harrods' bombing effectively exposed the terrorist as a flawed, inconsistent figure, and it is precisely this that Lessing sets out to explore in *The Good Terrorist*.

Critics such as Lurie, Watkins and Greene have argued that Lessing's novel adopts an 'oxymoronic title',²⁹⁹ although such readings usually locate this tension as arising from Alice's behaviour, as '[i]n Alice the personal and political are most drastically at odds in that her personal energies go to creating while her political efforts go to destroying . . . hence the oxymoron "good terrorist."³⁰⁰ But to see this oxymoron as referring to the discordant roles Alice adopts within the novel is to overlook the fundamental assumption that creates this tension even before one has opened the book: the "good terrorist" is only oxymoronic if one accepts that the terrorist is always inherently "bad". Placing this realisation in the web of contradictions surrounding the figuration of the terrorist in the aftermath of the Harrods bombing immediately complicates such an assumption. For if the terrorist is an inconsistent object, how can one possibly claim that he or she is innately "bad"? Arguing that Lessing's use of irony is indicative of her personal critique of the contemporary left is to presume Lessing is simply inscribing her own beliefs onto a particular context. However, read alongside the rhetoric around the bombing, it becomes clear that the irony which permeates *The Good Terrorist* is consonant with attempts to define the terrorist Other. In effect, Lessing mirrors the

²⁹⁷ Statement reported in Gareth Parry, 'Bomb Unauthorised Says IRA | Special Reports | Guardian.co.uk', December 19, 1983, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/fromthearchive/story/0,,1376054,00.html>.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Susan Watkins, *Doris Lessing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 116.; See also Greene, *Lessing: Poetics*, 213; and Alison Lurie, 'Bad Housekeeping', *The New York Review of Books*, December 19, 1985, paragraph 23, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1985/dec/19/bad-housekeeping/>.

³⁰⁰ Greene, *Lessing: Poetics*, 213.

contradictory logic present in the reposts to the attack on Harrods, extending it into the world of the terrorist themselves. Thus, when Donoghue criticises *The Good Terrorist* for its attempts to revisit a scene that 'has already been lodged in our minds by television programs and newspaper photographs . . . and [for trying] to make us imagine afresh what journalists and cameramen have so often delivered,'³⁰¹ he accidentally captures what Lessing is doing. She is taking the representations of the terrorist that the audience have become so familiar with, and fleshing them out as real characters, giving us terrorists so confused and inconsistent as to accord with the statements by the IRA and Britton. *The Good Terrorist* is therefore not so much about Lessing's personal politics as it is concerned with throwing into relief the nonsensical nature of the rhetoric around terrorism. Moreover, if the epistemology of terrorism constructs this Other by assuming it can define and know the terrorist, by entering the world of the terrorist, Lessing suggests that the stability and coherence this approach invests in its object are pure fantasy, as shall become clear. Rather than a weapon for conducting a crippling attack on the Left, then, Lessing's irony is in fact an act of resistance, working against attempts to reduce the other to defined and knowable categories.

Interestingly, as critics try to read *The Good Terrorist* by explaining Alice's behaviour in terms of her psychology, this resistance manifests itself. Not only do such readings echo the epistemological approach of terrorism discourses to female violence, their conclusions are strikingly similar too. To a certain extent, *The Good Terrorist* suggests that we have unimpeded access to mental processes that inform Alice's actions, as the reader shares her perspective and the text adopts a prose style Scanlan describes as 'surface realism', with 'its bubbling slop buckets and greasy packets of chips.'³⁰² But what this realist access to Alice reveals is somehow problematic. The only explanation Alice offers up for her current psychological make-up is the fact that as a child, she was traumatised by having to sleep in her parents' room when they held parties:

When there were parties, when there were people in the house, it seemed Alice became invisible to her mother, and had no place in her own home . . . Sleeping in her parents' bedroom made her violently emotional, and she could not cope with it.³⁰³

Alice's supposed boyfriend Jasper has a similarly petty trauma lurking behind his actions, as we are told his anger stems from a hatred of his father for being 'stupid enough to go in for

³⁰¹ Donoghue, 'Radical Homemaker', paragraph 3.

³⁰² Margaret Scanlan, 'Language and the Politics of Despair in Doris Lessing's "The Good Terrorist"', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 23, no. 2 (January 1, 1990): 83.

³⁰³ Doris Lessing, *The Good Terrorist* (London: Flamingo, 2003), 229 – 230.

dubious investments.³⁰⁴ Faye alone has suffered violence in her past, but as Roberta starts to describe Faye's upbringing, Alice thwarts her narrative:

“Communes. Squats. If you don't take care, that's what they become – people sitting around discussing their shitty childhoods. Never again. We're not here for that. Or is that what you want? A sort of permanent encounter group. Everything turns into that, if you let it.”³⁰⁵

For Greene, this interruption combines with the seeming pettiness of the instances that have psychologically scarred the other comrades to suggest 'Lessing draws a curtain across this aspect of her characters' lives, in a spirit of impatient dismissal.'³⁰⁶ In response to this apparent obfuscation, critics have a tendency to go looking behind this curtain, trying to understand why this 'collection of sick people . . . symptoms have taken a political turn.'³⁰⁷ But efforts to locate the genuine psychological origins of the group's terroristic turn in Alice's 'desire for union with her mother,'³⁰⁸ or in the frustrated sexualities within the commune³⁰⁹ work against the novel's realist language. The text does describe the seeds of each character's symptoms; they are simply not deemed satisfactory by Lessing's readers. Attempts to find the "real" psychological motivations circulating beneath the surface realism of the text assume that the reasons given are illegitimate, demonstrating an *a priori* understanding of what constitutes a "genuine" psychological explanation for terrorist violence. By providing her terrorists with apparently paltry psychological injuries, Lessing resists the established epistemology and in doing so, exposes the extent to which it is the culturally-constructed terrorist object we engage with, rather than the terrorists themselves.

Burger's Daughter has induced a similar brand of critique as critics turn to Rosa's psychological development in the novel in order to find the authorial political commentary Gordimer's irony withholds. Again, the realist prose, the specificity of the novel's context, and the recognition that Rosa's life history coincides with the National Party's rise to power and the institution of apartheid³¹⁰, all lead readers to argue that Rosa's interior world is a form of political allegory. If *The Good Terrorist* inspires a critical gesture that looks behind the curtain of the text, understanding Rosa by contrast involves a process of extraction. *Burger's Daughter* is a collection of Rosa's first-person narratives, addressed to a 'you' who is variously her lover Conrad, her step-mother Kathya, and her dead father, placed alongside third-person narratives

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 30.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 130.

³⁰⁶ Greene, *Lessing: Poetics*, 216.

³⁰⁷ Scanlan, *Plotting*, 83.

³⁰⁸ Jeannette King, *Doris Lessing* (London: Edward Arnold, 1989), 95.

³⁰⁹ Watkins, *Lessing*, 112–113.

³¹⁰ Dominic Head, *Nadine Gordimer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 112.

that observe Rosa from the perspectives of a biographer, gossiping friends and family, newspaper coverage, and secret service surveillance reports. As the novel revisits the same moments in different narrative modes, the authority of any single account is undermined, 'creating 'a tension between external image and internal voice, between "she" and "I".'³¹¹ The reader thus 'continually mediates the two, correcting the errors of the eye, emerging from the spell of the internal voice,'³¹² in an attempt to discern the significance of a moment from among these competing interpretations.

Burger's Daughter thus invites or requires the reader to work to find the text's meaning, as it frustrates the reader's access to the novel's presumed intent. But such excavations of meaning become problematic when they fail to recognise that this hindrance of the reader's epistemic eye is central to the novel's political intervention. When Uledi Kamanga, Smith, Head, Cooke, and others trace Rosa's psychological development throughout the novel, they not only produce notably consistent readings, they install another narrative layer over Rosa's presence by disentangling her from the narrative strands within the text.³¹³ These psychological or psychoanalytic metanarratives almost universally connect the instance where Rosa witnesses a black driver whipping a donkey with Rosa's later meeting with Zwelinzima, reading these moments as awakening some kind of sexual or sensual realisation within her. While these moments are rendered as revelatory in the novel, the process of extracting them from the novel and inserting them into a psychological account of Rosa's discovery of her femininity, her repressed sexuality, or her development after she is 'expelled from the womblike infantilization she is subjected to from so many sources'³¹⁴, works against the text itself. Rosa constantly reflects on the moods and motivations she detects in herself and others, often turning to the psychoanalytic for insight, as she shares Conrad's interest in Jung and other analysts.³¹⁵ Yet she simultaneously challenges the ability of such accounts to explain everything, as she rejects Conrad's psychoanalytic reading of her childhood home, insisting '[t]here's more to it. More than you guessed or wormed out of me in your curiosity and envy, talking when the lights were out, more than I knew, or wanted to know until I came to you.'³¹⁶

³¹¹ Judie Newman, 'Prospero's Complex: Race and Sex in Burger's Daughter', in *Nadine Gordimer's Burger's Daughter: A Casebook* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 103.

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ See for instance Brighton J Uledi Kamanga, *Nadine Gordimer's Fiction and the Irony of Apartheid* (Trenton, NJ.: Africa World Press, 2000); Smith, 'Black and White'; Daphne Read, 'The Politics of Place in "Burger's Daughter"', in *The Later Fiction of Nadine Gordimer*, ed. Bruce King (Basingstoke; London: Macmillan Press, 1993), 121–139; Head, *Gordimer*; John Cooke, *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer: Private Lives/Public Landscapes* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985).

³¹⁴ Clingman, 'Subject', 59–60.

³¹⁵ Nadine Gordimer, *Burger's Daughter* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000), 24.

³¹⁶ Ibid., 59.

Nowhere does the tension between text and psychological narrative become more apparent than in the significance such readings accord Rosa's late-night telephone call with Zwelinzima Vulindlela. Following a chance encounter in London which Rosa recognises Zwelinzima as her one-time childhood companion, Baasie, he calls Rosa to confront her with the reality of her idealised childhood memories. Zwelinzima's angry words are frequently read as 'presag[ing] the revolution of [Rosa's] identity once again,'³¹⁷ with many agreeing with Barnouw's claim that this confrontation leads Rosa to return to South Africa. But Barnouw makes it plain that this interpretation runs counter to Rosa's own explanation:

In one of her monologues addressed to her dead father, Rosa explains that it was not Baasie who has sent her back to South Africa, since he insisted that she and her family had lived "like anyone else," . . . Yet her decision is clearly influenced by the young black activist's rejection of her father's contribution to black struggle . . .³¹⁸

While there is no question that Zwelinzima's words have a profound effect on Rosa, when critiques follow Barnouw in claiming that 'Rosa's mind – and person – is changed dramatically by a late-night telephone conversation',³¹⁹ they do so by ignoring Rosa's own words, for in the monologue Barouw refers to, Rosa tell us:

It isn't Baasie – Zwel-in-zima, I must get the stress right – who sent me back here. You won't believe that. Because I'm living like anyone else, and he was the one who said who was I to think we could be different from any other whites. Like anyone else; but the idea started with Brandt Vermeulen. You and my mother and the faithful never limited yourselves to being like anyone else.³²⁰

Rosa, it seems, pre-empts critical analysis of her behaviour, realising that those around her – including the reader – will insert her actions into narrative that is not her own in order to give them coherence. As Rosa simultaneously address her father and the reader, she knows that both presences will cast their narrative shadows over her attempts to elucidate her own motivations. In a text that actively works to undermine the possibility of authoritative narrative, Rosa knows that, ironically, her own will not be believed.

Both the third-person narratives within the novel and the critical metanarrative thus construct Rosa as 'an object in the eyes of others whose internal reality remains unknown',³²¹ but can accessed by inserting her into a particular epistemological framework. In doing so, these narratives replicate both the gesture and methodology of terrorism discourses, overwriting Rosa's own words as they hunt for the "real" explanation in her personal sexual

³¹⁷ Clingman, 'Subject', 66.

³¹⁸ Dagmar Barnouw, 'Nadine Gordimer: Dark Times, Interior Worlds, and the Obscurities of Difference', *Contemporary Literature* 35, no. 2 (July 1, 1994): 261.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Gordimer, *Burger's*, 343.

³²¹ Newman, 'Prospero's', 100.

development. Yet as Head suggests, such approaches presume that Rosa is embedded in the narratives around her, while in fact the opposite is true. For as Head notes, although Rosa's accounts are permeated with temporal 'focalizers' that suggest she is variously in the present moment or reflecting on the past, encouraging a sense that she is developing within the novel, these temporal markers are disingenuous, creating 'an effect of uncertainty and vacillation which a closer reading, taking on board the matter of temporality, disproves: it is not that Rosa is confused, but rather that, ultimately, she is not. A resolution is anticipated in the juxtaposition.'³²² Rosa, then, is imparting knowledge to the reader from a temporality exterior to the text; she is speaking from a point of resolution, and is guiding the reader/listener towards this point. As such, to ignore Rosa's claims that her apparent transformation began in her encounters with Brandt Vermeulen is to risk missing the radical intervention *Burger's Daughter* makes into the political sphere. So what is this transformative idea?

Immediately prior to Rosa's decision to enlist the help of self-styled New Afrikaner Brandt Vermeulen in obtaining her passport through his political connections, Rosa comes face-to-face with the shifting climate of black anti-apartheid politics as Black Consciousness comes to the fore. In a meeting with her parents' black political allies, she watches as the white liberal journalist Orde Greer rallies against Duma Dhladhla's Black Consciousness politics. Disconcerted by Dhladhla's rejection and distrust of white activism, Greer finally demands to know 'What would you do if you were me?' In response, Dhladhla 'looked at Greer, importuned, triumphant and bored. 'I don't think about that.'³²³ This encounter leads Rosa to reflect on her parents' politics, realising that their activism was based on the refusal to "limit" themselves to being like everyone else, a refusal to accept that as human bodies with black or white skins, they were necessarily caught up in the same system that divided people by colonising those skins with specific meaning. For Rosa, her parents were only able to presume they could transcend these divisions and assume solidarity with the repressed black population through abstraction: 'They had the connection because they believed it was possible.'³²⁴ This very combination of abstraction and belief is what allows apartheid to unfold, meaning it is only the different intentions behind the rhetoric that marks the Burgers' anti-apartheid politics from those they oppose. In a country where 'words classified people into black and white, were used to write the existence of black people out of history, were forced out of people under torture and turned into stories which could be used against them, their family and their

³²² Head, *Gordimer*, 116.

³²³ Gordimer, *Burger's*, 166.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 171.

friends,³²⁵ the faith of the Burgers' and their fellow activists in the power of words to differentiate their political gesture from that of apartheid through conveying their true intentions is naïve at best. Realising this, Rosa tells us 'I have lost connection. It's only the memory of childhood warmth for me.'³²⁶

This loss of connection, of the ability to locate oneself outside the system of oppression by faith in rhetoric alone, leads Rosa to Vermeulen's door. As the third-person surveillance and biographical accounts make plain, by visiting Vermeulen, Rosa is entering new territory, visiting 'people whose allegiance made her father their enemy,'³²⁷ and following a map that 'did not direct her past the Supreme Court or the old synagogue converted for use as a court to which she knew the way.'³²⁸ As Rosa puts it:

I was entering each time a place that didn't exist for my father and that he would never have put me in, never, although he sent me to prisons; that he would never have set foot in himself, although I had inherited from him and from my mother the necessity of deviousness wily enough to get myself there . . .³²⁹

This sense of entering a new place, of a shared meeting ground made possible by Rosa's loss of connection, permeates her time with Vermeulen. As a New Afrikaner, we are told, Vermeulen has returned from his studies in the United States and Europe uncontaminated by 'foreign ideas of equality and liberty, to destroy what the great-great-grandfather died for at the hands of a kaffir and the Boer general fought the English for.'³³⁰ Rather, Vermeulen has returned with a new vocabulary, one which strengthens the apartheid regime's ability to face the challenges posed to it, be it from the criticisms lobbied by the global community or the home-grown unrest stirred up the Communist presence. Vermeulen and his ilk wish to

transform the home-whittled destiny of white to rule over black in terms that the generation of late-twentieth-century orientated Nationalist intellectuals would advance as the first true social evolution of the century, since nineteenth-century European liberalism showed itself spent in the failure of racial integration wherever this was tried, and Communism, accusing the Afrikaner of enslaving blacks under franchise of God's will, itself enslaved whites and yellows along with blacks in the denial of God's existence.³³¹

Having been confronted with the evolving discourse of Black Consciousness, Rosa now meets the emergent form of an new apartheid logic, a logic that eschews its roots and adopts the terms of contemporary global social and political thought to secure the survival of its

³²⁵ Barrett, "'What I Say'", 120.

³²⁶ Gordimer, *Burger's*, 171.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 172.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, 179.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, 195.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, 174.

³³¹ *Ibid.*

principles. For Vermeulen's aim is to continue the apartheid vision by weeding out the elements within its logic that threaten to undermine it:

He did not shrink from open contact with blacks as his father's generation did, and he regarded the Immorality Act as the relic of an antiquated libidinous backyard guilt about sex that ought to be scrapped, since in the new society of separate nations each flying the flag of its own skin, the misplacement of the white man's semen in a black vagina would emerge, transformed out of all recognition of source, as the birth of yet another nation.³³²

The gesture of the New Afrikaner, then, is to reframe apartheid logic in more palatable terms, providing new language for old principles by couching them in terms of social evolution. For Rosa, Vermeulen's rhetoric shares a common ground with her parents' own politics, and thus when she meets him, she becomes aware of:

a place where a meeting was possible between those for whom skin is an absolute value and those for whom it is not a value at all; a place whose shameful existence recognizes a possibility of there being anything to say between migrant miners, factory workers, homeless servants, landless peasants, and the class and colour that lives on them.³³³

This shameful place, whose existence was fundamentally disavowed by the Burgers and their fellow communist activists, is a place framed by the appropriation of skin. Be it making skin the defining trait of subjectivity or by according it no inherent meaning at all, both the New Afrikaners and the white anti-apartheid activists meet in the tussle over the value according to skin.

But whereas the rhetoric of the white communist 'faithful' relies on denying the existence of this common space for fear of rendering their efforts hopelessly, ineffectually ironic, Vermeulen has recognised the power of exposing one's own idiosyncrasies to ridicule:

He and his sort were the first to be sophisticated enough to laugh at the sort of thing only denigrators of the Afrikaner volk were supposed to laugh at: the Dutch Reformed Churches' denouncement of the wickedness of Sunday sport or cinema performances, the censorship board's ruling that white breasts on a magazine cover were pornography while black ones were ethnic art.³³⁴

Vermeulen himself is 'playfully boastful,' 'entertaining' with an 'ability not to take himself seriously.'³³⁵ It seems the ability to laugh at the ridiculous within one's own logic, to be the first to point out the absurd consequences of one's own politics becomes a means of reinforcing one's logic at its weakest point. To scan one's own narratives with an ironic eye ensures that such manifestations of vulnerability can be removed without challenging the logic that brought

³³² Ibid., 175.

³³³ Ibid., 195 – 196.

³³⁴ Ibid., 174–175.

³³⁵ Ibid., 182 – 183.

them into being. This is the idea that Rosa takes away from her meeting with Vermeulen, an idea that lies dormant throughout Rosa's sojourn in France and London, but that has ripened into a transformative force by the time Rosa is confronted by Zwelinzima. It is only by recognising that the seeds of Rosa's transformation were planted before she left South Africa and were cultivated by her experiences of Europe that one can fully comprehend the nature and implications of the change that brings her back to her homeland.

Escaping the epistemological frameworks of South African politics by going to stay with her step-mother Katya near Nice, Rosa experiences her flesh as a source of pleasure rather than political intrigue. As Read puts it, '[s]educed by the image of sensuousness, pleasure, romance, [Rosa] inhabits her body differently than in South Africa.'³³⁶ When her lover Bernard proclaims 'I am full of semen for you' Rosa knows that unlike her pretend romance with the political prisoner Noel de Witt, '[i]t has nothing to do with passion that had to be learned to deceive prison warders; and you're no real revolutionary waiting to decode my lovey-dovey as I dutifully report it.'³³⁷ Free from narratives that designate each body as overtly political, 'Rosa came to awareness of her own being like the rising of a tick of a clock in an empty room.'³³⁸ As such, Liscio argues that Rosa discovers *jouissance*, 'the timelessness of Nice is where pleasure and appetite . . . take precedence over action and responsibility. It is a self-enclosed, womblike space outside time and sequence.'³³⁹ Indeed, Rosa's new sensual awareness is imbued with a childlike selfishness, as she comes to identify herself with the women in Europe:

Something is owed to us. Young women, girls still. The capacity I feel, running down the sluiced alleys under flower-boxes to meet the man who tells me his flesh rises when his ears recognize the slither of my sandals, the flashes of bright feeling that buffet me at this point where I see the sea, the abundance for myself I sense in whiffs from behind the plastic ribbons of open kitchen doors . . . I see everything, everything, have to stop to stroke each cat . . . Or I go blindfold in the darkness of sensations I have just experienced, deaf to everything but a long dialectic of body and mind that continues within Bernard Chabaliere and me even when we're not together.³⁴⁰

Yet if Rosa's newly embodied awareness is initially self-absorbed, Liscio argues after Irigaray and Hélène Cixous that this realisation of *jouissance* leads to a new ethical awareness in Rosa, as '[p]leasure in the self is what enlarges the capacity to move freely toward a real other rather than one who will unconsciously be sought to fill one's lack . . . Rosa's growth opens her to the

³³⁶ Read, 'Politics of Place', 129.

³³⁷ Gordimer, *Burger's*, 287.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 280.

³³⁹ Lorraine Liscio, "'Burger's Daughter': Lighting a Torch in the Heart of Darkness', *Modern Fiction Studies* 33, no. 2 (1987): 256.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 308.

other as other, rather than as reflection of self.³⁴¹ Read too describes Rosa's sensual awaken in France as giving Rosa the means to move past 'the arrogant authority of seeing-and-knowing to the humility of listening and insight.'³⁴² In essence, both Read and Liscio characterise Rosa as achieving something resembling Irigaray's sensible transcendental as she learns the capacities and limits of her flesh through her sensual experiences, so as to no longer require the appropriation of the other to mark her subjectivity's boundaries.

It is perhaps in light of these strands of critique that the novel's epigraph is best understood: 'I am the place in which something has occurred.' As many critics note, Gordimer is citing Lévi-Strauss, but again, in a form of overwriting, this reference is usually offered up as illuminating only certain aspects of *Burger's Daughter*, with little space being given to asking what it means to 'be' a place 'in' which something can occur.³⁴³ While Gordimer does not give the source of this quote, Lévi-Strauss makes a remarkably similar comment in an interview about his work:

*Le livre passe à travers moi, je suis le lieu où pendant quelque mois ou années, des choses s'élaborent et se mettent en place, et puis elles se séparent comme si c'était une excretion.*³⁴⁴

(The book goes through me, I am the place where for some months or years, things are developed and put in place, and then they separate as if it were an excretion.)

When Lévi-Strauss speaks of being a place then, he is figuring himself as an interior space capable of ingesting things from the outside world, gathering them together into new arrangements, before pushing them back out into the world. Hence, to be a place is to have an interiority that generates meaning. Elsewhere, Lévi-Strauss elaborates on how this interiority is constituted:

I exist. Not, of course, as an individual, since in this respect, I am merely the stake – a stake perpetually at risk – in the struggle between another society, made up of several thousand million nerve cells lodged in the ant-hill of my skull, and my body, which serves as its robot. Neither psychology nor metaphysics nor art can provide me with a refuge. They are myths . . .³⁴⁵

For Lévi-Strauss, then, the subject is located in the neural networks of the brain and as such, it is the brain that becomes the interior space which ingests information and excretes new

³⁴¹ Ibid., 257.

³⁴² Read, 'Politics of Place', 132.

³⁴³ Indeed, most critics use this epigraph without attempting to locate it within Lévi-Strauss's oeuvre, taking it as a self-explanatory statement.

³⁴⁴ Claude Lévi-Strauss and Didier Eribon, *De Près et de Loin* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2009), 129. I am indebted to Vicky Lebeau for helping locate this quote. Translation my own.

³⁴⁵ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, trans. John and Doreen Weightman (London; New York: Jonathan Cape, 1973), 414.

meaning. While this formulation locates the subject in the grey matter of the brain, it nonetheless renders the rest of the body as simply the brain's container, moving past fleshly existence and into a minute network of cells hidden in the skull. Yet the logic of digestion and excretion that allows such a place to create meaning carry with them connotations of the passage through orifices, movement through the membranes that separate the body's interior and exterior, the exposure of foreign bodies to the transformative influence of the body's organs. To be the place in which something has occurred, then, one must necessarily have a body.

It is this recognition that the body is a place in which meaning can be constituted that lies at the heart of Rosa's decision to return to South Africa. Prior to her trip to Europe, Rosa is unable reconcile her own sensual experiences with her awareness that her father's politics share conceptual ground with the masters of apartheid. For example, as she hugs Marisa, one of her father's black activist friends, their meeting is marked with an intense physicality:

To touch in women's token embrace against the live, night cheek of Marisa, seeing huge for a second the lake-flash of her eye, the lilac-pink of her inner lip against translucent-edged teeth, to enter for a moment the invisible magnetic field of the body of a beautiful creature and to receive on oneself its imprint – breath misting and quickly fading on a pane of glass – this was to immerse in another mode of perception.³⁴⁶

In the immediacy of the moment, this sensuality alerts Rosa to the parallels between 'the transformation of the world a man seeks in the beauty of a woman'³⁴⁷ and the white population's association of the sensual with blackness, regardless of their politics. But Rosa is alert to the fact there is a boundary between the two, a pane of glass, and so does not confuse her attraction to Marisa with assumed consonance with her. Indeed, she understands that it is precisely this confusion that allowed her father to assume he could speak on behalf of or with that other, overwriting the difference present in the other's body. Yet at the same time, Rosa has a sense that our material vulnerabilities may be what we share. As she recalls her sharing a bed with Baasie as a child, the need for warmth, sleep and urination unite the two:

I was remembering a special, spreading warmth when Baasie had wet the bed in our sleep. In the morning the sheets were cold and smelly, I told tales to my mother . . . but in the night I didn't know whether this warmth that took us back into the enveloping fluids of a host body came from him or me.³⁴⁸

Prior to her visits to Vermeulen and Europe, Rosa's bodily experiences induce contradictory impulses, on the one hand luring her into an attraction that risks appropriating the other,

³⁴⁶ Gordimer, *Burger's*, 132.

³⁴⁷ Ibid., 132.

³⁴⁸ Ibid., 137.

while on the other, providing her with a sense that there is perhaps a communality that can be shared across the boundaries of race and gender. If being unable to cope with the contradictory position her own senses and South African politics put her in is what drives Rosa to Europe, it is coming to understand herself as an embodied subject, as a place capable of producing meaning specific to herself that makes it necessary for her to return.

As we see from the very beginning of *Burger's Daughter*, the contrast between third-person observations and Rosa's own accounts expose the limitations of such attempts to know the object's interiority. The novel opens with a biography-style observation of Rosa as she waits outside a prison to visit her incarcerated mother, scrutinising Rosa in great detail:

Rosa Burger, about fourteen years old at the time . . . was small for her age, slightly bottle-legged . . . with a tiny waist. Her hair was not freshly washed and the cartilage of her ear-tips broke the dark lank,[sic] suggesting that the ears were prominent though hidden . . . Her profile was prettier than her full-face; the waxy outline olive-skinned people often have, with the cave of the eye strikingly marked by the dark shining strip of eyebrow and the steep stroke of eyelashes, fuzzing at the ends like the antennae of moths . . . nostrils that cut back too sharply, half-healed and picked-at blemishes round the big soft mouth that curled and tightened . . . a mouth exactly like her father's.³⁴⁹

The observer tries to give us a sense of who Rosa is through her physical appearance, hinting that her political heritage is inscribed in her genes. But the observer has no direct access to Rosa, left to speculate that 'she probably had not slept well the previous night'³⁵⁰ and turning to her school reports for further insight into Burger's daughter. If this account can only attempt to read signs of who Rosa is from her exterior appearance and her location, Rosa's own experience of her body in that context shows the flaws of such readings. As she recalls standing outside the prison, she tells us it was not the political situation that resulted in her mother's imprisonment that concerned, but rather that her

real awareness is all focused in the lower part of my pelvis, in the leaden, dragging, wringing pain there. Can anyone describe the peculiar fierce concentration of the body's forces in the menstruation of early puberty. . . outside the prison the internal landscape of my mysterious body turns me inside out, so that in that public place on that public occasion . . . I am within that monthly crisis of destruction, the purging, tearing, draining of my own structure. I am my womb, and a year ago I wasn't aware – physically – I had one.³⁵¹

From the very beginning, Rosa's body, her skin, marks the limit of attempts to know her. Her body is a boundary that third-person narratives cannot cross, frustrating access to her identity and thus leading to readings of her that do not correspond to her own reality. But it is

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 4.

³⁵⁰ Ibid., 5.

³⁵¹ Ibid., 9–10.

not just these third-person narratives that her personal recollections work to highlight as flawed. Recalling how her parents' used her as a means of passing messages to the imprisoned Noel de Witt, Rosa undermines their assumption that she is acting purely in the name of politics, as she reveals that her flesh not only concealed her true intentions from the prison authorities, but also from her parents:

I was not a fake. Once a month I sat as they had sent me to take their messages and receive his, a female presented to him with the smiling mouth, the gazing yet evasive eyes, the breasts drooping a little as she hunched forward, a flower standing for what lies in her lap.³⁵²

The political interpretation of her actions becomes the guise through which Rosa communicates her own desire, rather than vice versa. Throughout the novel, then, Rosa's body and recollections of her physical experiences undercut the efforts of others to insert her into external narratives. In doing so, she leaves the reader as confused as Vermeulen, as he tries to read Rosa's intentions in her physicality: 'There was no indication of what impression she wanted to make, this girl . . . she was either so vulnerably open that her presence in the world made an impossible claim, or so inviolable that her openness was an arrogant assumption – which amounted to the same thing.'³⁵³

But if, as Head suggests, Rosa is speaking to us from a point of resolution, can we not read the way in which Rosa's physicality and sensuality cast an ironic light across the narratives that seek to shape her as an intentional intervention? Or to put it another way, as a political intervention? For as Rosa returns to South Africa to work in a hospital, it is to live 'like anyone else', rather than assume her anti-apartheid sentiments place her as somehow outside the system of oppression:

Nothing can be avoided. Roland Ferguson, 46, ex-miner, died on the park bench while I was busy minding my own business. No one can defect.
I don't know the ideology:
It's about suffering.
How to end suffering.
And it ends in suffering. Yes, it's strange to live in a country where there are still heroes. Like anyone else, I do what I can. I am teaching them to walk again, at Baragwanath Hospital. They put one foot before the other.³⁵⁴

In coming to understand herself as an embodied subject, Rosa finds a means to resist and yet participate in the culture which locates her in the position of oppressor. The rejection of ideology in favour of the recognition of suffering is in effect a move away from the abstract in

³⁵² Ibid., 65.

³⁵³ Liscio, 'Torch', 180–181.

³⁵⁴ Gordimer, *Burger's*, 343–344.

favour of a politics grounded in the human body. This is a perilous gesture in the context of apartheid South Africa, for the regime's logic makes use of the body to justify the repression of those with black skin. But Gordimer suggests the crucial difference in Rosa's gesture is that in recognising herself as an embodied subject, she respects the limits her flesh imposes on her and understands the flesh of others marks a horizon she cannot pass. Thus, Rosa's sense of herself as place in which meaning is produced prevents her imposing her terms on the other. Yet for Gordimer, this ethical awareness does not reduce each subject to the personal alone, unable to participate in the political sphere for fear of colonising the other. Rather, as we have seen, recognising oneself as a place establishes the body as a site of resistance, a place that cannot be permeated by grand narratives or accessed by the epistemological eye. Moreover, *Burger's Daughter* suggests that it is by embracing the contradictions that accompany embodied existence in South Africa as opposed to denying the contradictions between one's personal experience and one's politics that one can secure ethical intentions. For just as Vermeulen and his cohorts laugh at the weaknesses in their own politics in order to maintain their fundamental principles, so the inconsistencies between the rhetoric around Rosa and her personal experience reveal the flaws that threaten to undermine the ethical intentions of the anti-apartheid movement. The ironic insight that Rosa's embodied subjectivity instigates thus acts 'like a kind of corrective, a rein.'³⁵⁵

In a culture that assumes the body of the other can be appropriated, Gordimer refigures it as always resisting the epistemological frameworks that try to inscribe external narratives upon it. Not only does the flesh of the other render their interiority unknowable, it is by learning to speak from one's own embodiment that one can counter the appropriative gestures that allow such politics to unfold. In other words, by rejecting the artificial divide between the 'personal' and 'political', one resists the very system that relies on these distinctions and ensures that one's ethics have no common ground with those you oppose. In the figure of Rosa, then, Gordimer gives us a woman who becomes a freedom fighter specifically because she rejects the ability of the ideological to represent the other, a woman for whom the distinction between the personal and political are consonant with the system of oppression. In contrast to the vulnerable female terrorist, Rosa's radical acceptance of her immanence is precisely that which renders her dangerous to the State and results in her imprisonment.

If *Burger's Daughter* suggests faith in the ideological facilitates the appropriation of the other, *The Good Terrorist* demonstrates how this translates into terrorist action. Indeed,

³⁵⁵ Nancy Topping Bazin and Marilyn Dallman Seymour, eds., *Conversations with Nadine Gordimer* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1990), 172.

Lessing's novel connects this terroristic turn to the fact that the comrades in the squat lack any sense of themselves as embodied subjects, as places capable of articulating meaning. Throughout the novel, the comrades use ideological knowledge and affiliations both to convey to the group who they are and to judge each other. Faye garners respect in spite of her volatile personality as she 'had read a great deal, more than any of them, and was particularly well up on Althusser,'³⁵⁶ Jasper has ready access to 'the familiar phrases of the socialist lexicon' thanks to his reading socialist publications,³⁵⁷ while previous experiences in communes secures Alice a place in the squat. Lack of overt political affiliation leads the dedicated within the commune to view Jim, Philip, Mary and Reggie with suspicion, while Comrade Andrew's presumed connections with the 'Russians' mean the group accord him the status of 'the real thing.'³⁵⁸ So important is ideological rhetoric in establishing identity within the commune that there is little sympathy for those perceived as lacking such dedication; no one is perturbed by Jim's departure, while Philip's death leaves everyone but Alice unmoved. Moreover, through Alice's observations, we are continually made aware that the comrades rarely speak in something resembling their own voice, as she detects repeatedly the effort behind an apparently spontaneous expression. Roberta speaks not in her own voice but in 'a made-up one. Modelled on Coronation Street, probably.'³⁵⁹ Faye's cockney accent rapidly falls away as the 'raw, raucous, labouring' voice emerges from her 'lower depths.'³⁶⁰ Rather than a collection of sick people, then, what Lessing gives us is group who strive to insert themselves into abstract narratives and equate themselves with certain stereotypes in order to establish their sense of identity.

Lessing brings this to the fore in the figure of Alice, for despite the novel's realist prose, Alice remains a curiously elusive body.

Alice was stocky, and she had a pudgy, formless look to her. Sometimes a girl of twelve, even thirteen, before she is lit by pubescence, is as she will be in middle age. . . Alice could seem like a fattish clumsy girl, or sometimes, about fifty, but never looked her age, which was thirty-six.³⁶¹

In contrast to the moderately political Mary, 'a pleasant ordinary girl, all brown shining curls and fresh skin [l]ike an advertisement for medium-quality toilet soap,'³⁶² Alice's physicality does not correspond to a distinct form, slipping between girlishness and middle-age but never

³⁵⁶ Lessing, *Good Terrorist*, 277.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 235.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 125.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 29.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, 99–100.

coinciding with her actual existence. Moreover, unlike Rosa Burger, Alice seems numb to the sensual despite her preoccupation with establishing creature comforts in the squat. While the other occupants of No. 43 Old Mill Road refuse to wash in cold water, Alice is undeterred by the discomfort of cold water against her skin.³⁶³ Sensual pleasure similarly eludes Alice, for although she repeatedly cooks the group homemade soups, she is puzzled by the obvious pleasure others take in similar efforts:

[Alice] sat gratefully watching Caroline, who worked smiling, full of a rich secret contentment that seemed to spill out over her, like candlelight. Alice felt meagre, dry; she did these things, cooked and fed and nurtured, but it was out of having to, a duty. She had never in her life felt what she saw brimming over in Caroline who, as she licked a spoon to test a sauce, looked at Alice over it as though she were sharing some pleasure with her that only the rare, the initiated, of the world could even suspect.³⁶⁴

Nowhere does Alice's lack of initiation into the world of the sensual become more apparent than when she is confronted with the sexual desire of others. The notion that her mother's friends Theresa and Anthony 'were naked at night in bed together' leaves Alice feeling sick,³⁶⁵ while the 'grunting and panting, moaning and *wanting*' of Bert and Pat's passion repulses Alice, 'her ears assaulted, her mind appalled.'³⁶⁶ Alice, we are told, has decided 'to do without'³⁶⁷ sex, preferring instead her sibling-like relationship with Jasper: 'Alice liked it when people made the mistake . . . 'People often take us a brother and sister.'³⁶⁸

Estranged from the sensual and sexual, with a curiously fluid physical presence, Alice is arguably a fleshless figure for much of the novel. Indeed, Alice's body is only present in fragments, be it in the 'tears streaming'³⁶⁹ from her eyes throughout the text, the heart she has to keep 'on a short cruel chain like a dangerous dog'³⁷⁰ because of its tendency to ache and yearn, or her stomach, which churns and leaves her feeling sick at the smallest trigger. Her only persistent exterior surface is her wrist, which becomes a conduit through which Jasper pulls Alice into whatever he intends to do. Without a fleshly awareness to construct a sense of herself as place capable of absorbing exterior narratives and turning them into something new, Alice instead has a chameleon-like ability to slip into the skin that the discourses around her require. As she goes to the Council, she shucks her revolutionary skin and becomes what she considers the Council want to see:

³⁶³ Ibid., 61.

³⁶⁴ Ibid., 308–309.

³⁶⁵ Ibid., 36.

³⁶⁶ Ibid., 45 *Italics in original*.

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ Ibid., 12.

³⁶⁹ Ibid., 7.

³⁷⁰ Ibid., 193.

the pretty daughter of her mother, short curly fair hair nicely brushed, pink and white face lightly freckled, open blue-grey gaze. A middle-class girl with her assurance, her knowledge of the ropes, sat properly in the chair, and if she wore a heavy blue military jacket, under it was a flowered pink and white blouse.³⁷¹

Talking to the squat's neighbour Joan Robbins, Alice can repeatedly adopt the 'smile of a householder,' entering into the suburban niceties of gossips over the hedge, or at least 'that's what observers would see.'³⁷² She is every bit the boss' daughter, '[i]ndolent and privileged,'³⁷³ when she visits her father's office, while she consistently remembers herself in her mother's home as 'a good girl, a good daughter, as she had always enjoyed being.'³⁷⁴ In contrast to this decorum, Alice becomes a feral, 'spitting' creature, with 'her blood on fire, her face distorted with excitement' as she participates in political protest,³⁷⁵ or alternatively switches to 'her 'meeting voice,' for she had learned this was necessary' when the group engages in political discussion, even though '[t]o her, it sounded false and cold'.³⁷⁶ If it is Rosa's physicality that renders the discourses around her ironic, it is Alice's lack of flesh which exposes the inconsistency of her position. Without a sense of herself as a distinct space, Alice moulds herself to fit the requirements of her context. Shaped entirely by the demands of each situation, Alice literally becomes a 'figure of speech,' cloaked in a linguistic skin appropriate to the narrative requirements of her various contexts.

Alice's willingness to slot herself into the required rhetorical mode confers irony on her actions and as such, she is emblematic of the commune as a whole. While each member is keen to situate themselves within ideological rhetoric, they do so purely to provide themselves with a means of distinguishing themselves from 'the bloody middle classes'³⁷⁷ rather than for the cause they espouse. This produces a 'heavy-handed irony about allies of workers who never work,'³⁷⁸ whose efforts are not welcomed by those at the picket lines³⁷⁹ and whose actions are motivated by desire, not politics:

Faye said excitedly: 'I'd like to have a go at one of those vans. You know, when I saw that thing standing there, armoured, all lit up, it had wire over the windscreen, I just hated it so *much* – it looked bloody *evil*.'³⁸⁰

³⁷¹ Ibid., 24.

³⁷² Ibid., 84 and later, 117.

³⁷³ Ibid., 201.

³⁷⁴ Ibid., 49.

³⁷⁵ Ibid., 156 and 254.

³⁷⁶ Ibid., 10.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 104.

³⁷⁸ Scanlan, *Plotting*, 83.

³⁷⁹ Lessing, *Good Terrorist*, 125.

³⁸⁰ Ibid., 78. Italics in original.

It seems that Lessing is in accord with terrorism discourses, constructing the comrades as peculiarly vulnerable to ideological influences thanks to their personal vagaries. But in fact, Lessing suggests something subtler is taking place. From the moment that Alice and Jasper join the commune at the novel's opening, the comrades' discussions revolve around the desire to show 'serious' commitment to their cause, even if that cause itself remains undefined. We learn from Bert that getting serious involves approaching the IRA as volunteers, a suggestion that precipitated the departure of half of the previous squatters, for as Bert describes it, 'I underestimated the political maturity of the cadres.'³⁸¹ Setting up a commune, therefore, does not constitute serious political commitment in the eyes of the comrades, despite the fact they are all nominally members of the Communist Centre Union (CCU). In fact, creating a shared domestic space is entirely apolitical, as Alice observes as she reflects on her efforts to repair No.43 while the others are out at protests: 'Here I am, fussing about the house, when they are doing something serious.'³⁸² Moreover, Pat speaks for the majority when she argues maintaining the communal space becomes a direct threat to the group's political aspirations: 'My point is that this business of having a nice clean house and a roof over our heads is beginning to define us. It is what we do.'³⁸³ The comrades thus share terrorism discourses' assumption that the domestic sphere is devoid of political or ideological intent. It is action that takes place beyond the domestic confines of the squat that is worthy of the accolade of seriousness.

But even attending protests, fighting the police, and splashing political slogans across London are not enough to constitute serious commitment. Convinced of the amateurish nature of their interventions so far, Bert and Jasper attempt to volunteer the group for terrorist action, approaching both the IRA and unspecified Russian comrades. In each case, they return rejected as these organisations 'had not taken Jasper and Bert seriously.'³⁸⁴ Stripped of the ideological narratives that would inscribe their desire for violence with a cause, it becomes apparent that for the comrades, it is not the attachment to a cause that is conceived as bestowing seriousness. For they all concur with Bert that 'the comrades present see no reason to accept directives from Moscow,'³⁸⁵ and Jocelyn impresses them all as she argues '[w]ho are the IRA to tell us what to do in our own country?'³⁸⁶ Ultimately, the group decide to turn to violence without the permission or justification of 'any other extraneous

³⁸¹ Ibid., 10.

³⁸² Ibid., 78.

³⁸³ Ibid., 102.

³⁸⁴ Ibid., 206.

³⁸⁵ Ibid., 302.

³⁸⁶ Ibid., 305.

source,³⁸⁷ and in doing so, evacuate their actions of any ideological or political intent. Yet as they finally lay their hands on the *matériel* that will facilitate their turn to violence, they share the sense that they are now commencing on 'Real work.'³⁸⁸ But having rejected the authority of external ideological and political influences, what supports this continued sense within the group that their need for violence is anything other than an expression of the personal? How is it they assume they are still pursuing something serious when they have rejected their political influences as irrelevant? Scanlan provides us with a clue when she argues that Lessing's terrorists echo the axiom that terrorism emerges where words fail. For Scanlan, '[t]he terrorist despairs of "mere words" in an age of mass journalism, arguing that speech can only be heard when it is supplemented with dynamite.'³⁸⁹ The comrades share this assumption that the terrorist's capacity to garner media attention makes them significant, rushing off to buy all the newspapers, 'from *The Times* to *The Sun*'³⁹⁰ in the early hours of the morning to see how their experimental bombing of a bollard is reported. Furious that the only attention their actions have merited is 'a little paragraph in the *Guardian*, that said some hooligans had blown up the corner of a street,' the group are left ever more determined: 'We'll show them.'³⁹¹ This lack of media recognition spurs the group on, leading them to plant a car bomb outside the Kubla Khan Hotel, killing five people including Faye as she fails to get out of the car in time. Gathered around the radio after the event, it becomes plain how significant the media's representation of their actions is for them, as Alice's last-minute call to the Samaritans leads the media to believe the attack was perpetrated by the IRA: 'Well, what about that,' said Jocelin. 'What a fucking nerve.'³⁹² It is neither political ideology nor simply the desire to murder that motivates Lessing's terrorists: it is the desire to be taken seriously, a seriousness which only media attention can assign. Thus, in an ironic twist that echoes Zulaika and Douglass's claims that terrorism discourses construct the very object they set out to describe, Lessing gives us a household of individuals aspiring to the image of the terrorist purveyed by the media.

The comrades' mutual quest to inscribe serious purpose to their lives, to decisively differentiate themselves from the middle class masses, does not leave them vulnerable to exploitation by ideological organisations; it inspires them to equate themselves with the epistemological object of the terrorist. In doing so, Lessing renders the epistemological attempts to understand the terrorist's motivations as inherently flawed, for she suggests the

³⁸⁷ Ibid., 302.

³⁸⁸ Ibid., 223.

³⁸⁹ Scanlan, *Plotting*, 77.

³⁹⁰ Lessing, *Good Terrorist*, 335.

³⁹¹ Ibid.

³⁹² Ibid., 386.

terrorists themselves have no clear sense of why they are pursuing this course of action. How can terrorism discourses claim to know the terrorist's rationale when they lack any definitive sense of this themselves? For throughout the novel, Alice has foregrounded the possibility that the individual is not necessarily aware of their own motives. She is a political activist who refuses to engage with political texts, for fear that 'if she persevered, allowing one book to lead her on to another, she might find herself lost without maps.'³⁹³ For Alice it is inconceivable 'that a comrade with a good, clear and correct view of life could be prepared to endanger it by reading all that risky equivocal stuff that she might dip into, hastily, retreating, as if scalded.'³⁹⁴ Hence, Alice retreats from the very words that could be used to explain her involvement in terrorist action. Deprived of an ideological explanation for her presence in her current situation, the turn to the personal to find motive is similarly frustrated, for although we have access to Alice's mind, it is a mind that remains mysterious to Alice herself. She is continually surprised by her own actions and intuitions. For example, she is passive in the face of her own insight as, out of the blue:

she remarked dreamily, 'What have you and Bert decided then?'

A quick movement from Jasper, which she noted, thinking, I didn't know I was going to say that . . . then she remarked, in her dreamy voice and to her own surprise, 'With the comrades in 45, I wonder. . .' She stopped. Interested in what she had said. Respectful of it.

But he had shot up on his elbow and was staring at her. . . He did not ask: How do you know about the other house. . . he had learned she could do this: know, without being told.³⁹⁵

Moreover, Alice's encounters with her mother reveal that there are vast gaps in Alice's memory, for a mere '[t]hree hours after she had left home screaming abuse at her mother, she dialled her number' in order to ask for money, unable to remember that her mother is in fact broke and selling her home.³⁹⁶ Although the reader now knows that Dorothy Mellings must move out, Alice cannot retain this information, repressing it in favour of her own idealised version of her mother's situation. Even having access to Alice's mind, then, does not open up the possibility of explaining her actions, for 'Alice did know that she forgot things, but not how badly, or how often.'³⁹⁷ Such small instances of observation from an exterior narrator pepper the text, revealing how far Alice fails to understand her own emotions: 'What Alice felt then was a slicing cold pain – jealousy; but she did not know it was that'.³⁹⁸ Thus Alice's own

³⁹³ Ibid., 66.

³⁹⁴ Ibid.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., 87–88.

³⁹⁶ Ibid., 18.

³⁹⁷ Ibid., 395.

³⁹⁸ Ibid., 37.

thoughts mingle with small instances of external observation in a way that suggests that she herself is not fully aware of what drives her.

Alice's bemusement at her own behaviour becomes most pronounced when she is overwhelmed by the desire for violence. For instance, as she and Philip examine the kitchen the Council has attempted to make uninhabitable, '[s]he said, 'I could kill them.' She heard her voice, deadly. She was surprised at it. She felt her hands hurting and unclenched them.'³⁹⁹ At such moments, Alice no longer coincides with herself, standing back and observing her actions in a way that suggests she is no more privy to her interior workings than the reader. This becomes particularly troubling in light of Alice's periodic violent eruptions:

Luckily there was no one to see her, as she exploded inwardly, teeth grinding, eyes bulging, fists held as if knives were in them. She stormed around the kitchen, like a big fly shut in a room on a hot afternoon, banging herself against the walls, corners of table and stove, not knowing what she did, and making grunting, whining, snarling noises – which soon, she heard. She knew that she was making them and, frightened, sat down at the table, perfectly still, containing what she felt.⁴⁰⁰

Yet such violent moments of self-abandonment are troubling precisely because the reader is watching, looking for an explanation that Alice is unable to give. Interestingly, if it is throwing herself against the world that enables Alice to reach a point in which she can contain her feelings, it is in the rare instances where Alice becomes aware of her flesh-and-blood body as a sensual entity that she becomes utterly impenetrable to the reader's gaze. As she removes a wedge of stolen cash from her underwear to hand it over to Jasper:

The package of notes had got caught in the waist-band of her jeans, and she stood fumbling. Her fingers were sliding over the satiny warmth of her skin, and in a sweet intimate flash of reminder, or of warning, her body (her secret breathing body which she ignored for nearly all of her time, trying to forget it) came to life and spoke to her. Her fingers were tingling with the warm smoothness, and she stood there looking puzzled or undecided, the packet of notes loose in her hand. She looked as if she were trying to remember something.⁴⁰¹

As Alice is awakened to the possibility of her flesh, the reader sees only that flesh, not into her mind, as she enters a kind of trance that remains outside the frame of the narrative:

She even put her seduced fingers to her nose and sniffed them, seeming even more puzzled and dismayed. She understood she was standing on the pavement with people walking past, the traffic rushing up and down – had been standing there, stock-still, for how long?⁴⁰²

³⁹⁹ Ibid., 59.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., 132.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., 212.

⁴⁰² Ibid., 213.

To have flesh, it seems, is to resist the epistemological gaze altogether, as Alice's physicality forecloses the access to her consciousness altogether.

The ideas that the subject may not understand their own actions and that the body resists attempts to know the subject's interior coalesce as the comrades decide to embark on their terrorist adventure. After Faye's suicide attempt and Philip's death, Alice becomes an increasingly physical form but a dwindling narrative presence. She begins to sleep deeply, missing events that mean that like Alice, the reader has to rely on the accounts of those around her. She becomes progressively mute and yet more physically present than at any other time:

They all looked at Alice.

Alice did not move, but stirred her tea.

'Well, what's wrong with you, then?' demanded Jasper.

'I'm tired,' she said.

She got up, in a way that seemed both impulsive and mechanical. She seemed surprised she had got up and was going to the door. Jasper was after her and had her by the wrist . . . A long pause, and she came back to her chair, went on stirring her tea as if she had not left.⁴⁰³

Whereas once Alice's intuitive words surprised her, now her physical movements do. She now becomes a heavy, reluctant presence, physically pushed and pulled into the narrative flow of the novel as Jasper calls her to a meeting to decide on the target:

It was as if, for her, getting up on his order and coming downstairs was going to commit her more than she wanted, commit her *again*, when she had made a decision . . . 'Oh *no*,' said Alice, breathless, to the wall. 'Oh no, *I can't*.' But she suddenly got up, dragged on her jeans and jersey, and went down.⁴⁰⁴

Alice's actions contradict her words, as her body pursues the terrorist cause despite her vocal reticence. Just as Alice's sensual awareness renders her consciousness obscure to the narrative, so her increased physical presence in the approach to terrorist action coincides with an absence of narrated thought, leaving Alice a puppet-like presence. In fact, given that the majority of the novel is constituted by Alice's thought-processes, as her consciousness falls silent, Lessing is suggesting that there is nothing to be narrated, that Alice's decision to follow the terrorist plot through remains beyond the bounds of what can be known through narration and thus cannot be considered a decision at all. Alice, in effect, does not know why she has turned to terrorism and, as such, remains curiously detached from her actions. It is only minutes before the attack her thoughts emerge again, as she realises 'people might be *killed* . .

⁴⁰³ Ibid., 342–343.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., 341. Italics in original.

. oh no, that couldn't happen!'⁴⁰⁵ leading her to make a frantic call to the Samaritans in an attempt to warn people, adding as 'an afterthought' the claim it is an IRA attack.⁴⁰⁶ As motiveless terrorist, blind to the consequences of her actions, Alice ends the novel sitting in the squat's kitchen the day after the attack:

Smiling gently, a mug of very strong sweet tea in her hand, looking this morning like a nine-year-old girl who has had, perhaps, a bad dream, the poor baby sat waiting for it to be time to go out and meet the professionals.⁴⁰⁷

This final observation from the external narrative voice reveals the ultimate irony of Alice's situation. For it is implied that 'the professionals' Alice intends to meet are those investigating terrorist activity, professionals who are interested in Alice precisely because of her inadvertent connection to the IRA. Unlike the narrator and the reader, these professionals will presume that Alice had distinct motives, inscribing the vacuum of Alice's conscious intent with their own interpretations, making her the subject they want her to be. For in giving the reader access to the very psychological and personal spaces the epistemology of terrorism wants to penetrate, *The Good Terrorist* suggests that even presuming there is anything revelatory to be found in such spaces relies on constructing an epistemological object who knows their own mind. In exposing the flaws and inconsistencies of the terrorist object, Lessing opens up the possibility that even the terrorist does not comprehend their motivations, and in doing, renders the discourses that presume to know what the terrorist does not ironic.

In both *Burger's Daughter* and *The Good Terrorist*, the presence of women serves to complicate the epistemological assumptions that facilitate the construction of the terrorist object. But rather than becoming merely problematic presences that require exceptional explanation, women in Gordimer and Lessing's work resist altogether the distinction between the personal and the ideological that underpins the concept of terrorism. In *Burger's Daughter*, it is precisely the rejection of this artificial division that brings about the possibility of insurgent action, while *The Good Terrorist* suggests that categorising motivations as ideological or personal involves an *a priori* colonisation of the terrorist object. In each instance, then, women's immanence resists rather than facilitates epistemological understanding. Moreover, it is arguably because women are always understood in terms of their immanence that Gordimer and Lessing choose to engage with these specific socio-historical moments through a female protagonist, for women will be read in relation to their context. As such, it is the presence of women that allows the specificity of their context to enter the text and to be read

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., 377.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., 379.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., 397.

in terms appropriate to it, rather than inserted into an abstract narrative of terrorism in general. Rather than being automatically apolitical by virtue of her immanence, woman's embeddedness allows Gordimer and Lessing to critique the discourses that claim to know and narrate a particular ideological context. In other words, instead of leaving her psychologically vulnerable to exploitation by the masters of grand narratives, Gordimer and Lessing figure women's personal experience as that which resists appropriation, fundamentally challenging the epistemology of terrorism's claims to know the terrorist.

Yet both *Burger's Daughter* and *The Good Terrorist* were written and published nearly two decades before terrorism discourses reached the height of their influence. Arguably, although Gordimer and Lessing give us women who shake the ground upon which the epistemology of terrorism rests, as we have seen, the post-September 11th, 2001 rhetoric around terrorism does not recognise the potential nuances and challenges posed by women's involvement in terrorist or militant action. Instead, as terrorism discourses come to the fore in global politics as never before, they carry with them traditional stereotypes of women as passive participants or emotionally vulnerable individuals. Whilst we have long realised that legal and cultural frameworks in even the most 'liberated' countries take the masculine as the normative, human subject, to date such frameworks remain idiosyncratic, regional, and contextual. However, it is within emerging global discourses like those around terrorism, seemingly nothing to do with gender and sexuate identities, that understandings of normative identities are being exported, absorbed, and encoded at a global level. This quiet installation of a global norm has the potential to be incredibly tenacious, as it remains largely beneath the level of explicit articulation and produces a hegemonic epistemological and ontological reading of women and femininity that is harder to counter than the explicit anomalies thrown up by regional or culturally-specific genderings. It is with this in mind that we now turn to post-September 11th literature, to see how far our idiosyncratic symbolic spaces have come to share the conceptual ground of global terrorism discourses. Has September 11th, 2001, impacted on concepts of gender within our own culture?

Chapter 3: Ian McEwan's *Saturday* and Meaning Things After September 11th

In the author's note that opens *The Second Plane: September 11: 2001-2007* (2008), Martin Amis asserts boldly:

[I]f September 11 had to happen, then I am not at all sorry that it happened in my lifetime. That day and what followed from it: this is a narrative of misery and pain, and also of desperate fascination. Geopolitics may not be my natural subject, but masculinity is. And have we ever seen the male idea in such outrageous garb as the robes, combat fatigues, suits and ties, jeans, tracksuits, and medics' smocks of the Islamic radical?⁴⁰⁸

Throughout this collection of short stories and newspaper articles written in response the attacks and their aftermath, we see Amis striving to establish the boundary between the West's ideals of masculinity and those outrageous versions of masculinity that burst so violently onto the world stage on September 11th, 2001. For Amis, there is little doubt that the rhetoric of terrorism is in fact about gender, a tussle between conflicting models of masculinity. Thus, responding to the terrorist Other becomes a process of asserting one's own ideals, or more specifically, establishing one's own concepts of masculinity as superior. As an author, Amis feels he is well-placed to go about this rethinking of masculinity. His short stories enter the minds of the September 11th attackers and Saddam Hussein's body-doubles, each time exposing them to be misogynistic, slavish, miserable men, while his articles call for a rejection of moral relativism that refuses to recognise that Western men are better than these depraved creatures, a fact to which women's relative positions in Islamic and Western societies pay testament.⁴⁰⁹ Neither Amis' focus on differing kinds of masculinity nor his use of women to mark the borders between the outrageous and the enlightened man are particularly new to his work, for as Diedrick notes, 'Amis has a great deal to say about men – as fathers, mentors, friends, rivals, domestic or world-historical tyrants. He has so much to say, in fact, that women are often crowded off the page . . . reforc[ing] the perception that in Amis's world, the primary purpose of women is to delineate relationships between men.'⁴¹⁰ What is perhaps more intriguing is that Amis is not the only British author to detect this need to differentiate Western masculinity from Islamic or terrorist masculinity in the wake of the September 11th attacks.

⁴⁰⁸ Martin Amis, *The Second Plane: September 11: Terror and Boredom* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2008), x.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁴¹⁰ James Diedrick, *Understanding Martin Amis* (London: Eurospan, 2004), 180–181. Interestingly, Diedrick is referring to Amis' more autobiographical writing, and how he portrays both his wives and his sister.

Ian McEwan prefaces his novel *Saturday* (2005) with an extended quote from Bellow's 1964 novel *Herzog*, opening with a question: 'For instance? Well, for instance, what it means to be a man. In a city. In a century. In transition.'⁴¹¹ Setting his novel in London eighteen months after the attacks, in the build-up to the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, it is clear that McEwan intends his novel to be read in relation to Bellow's exploration of a man in crisis, and to be understood as an examination of what it is to be a man at this particular socio-historical juncture. In accordance with an Irigarayan reading of terrorism, then, both Amis and McEwan perceive the resurgence of the material in the terroristic moment as throwing masculine ideals into crisis. But if McEwan shares this conceptual ground with terrorism discourses, this suggests in rethinking what it is to be a man, a Western man, a British man, in a global community that places him alongside the terrorist Other, McEwan will need to replicate terrorism discourses' insistence on the tie between symbolic and the material in order to distinguish his notions of masculinity from those of this threatening Other. As such, it is perhaps no surprise that in *Saturday* we see one of the central figures in British postmodern literature rejecting linguistic playfulness and notions of moral relativism, for the times demand a different understanding of language and require a definitive moral or ethical code. By bringing scientific and literary discourses into dialogue, *Saturday* works to connect language to the material world and in doing so, develops an ethical approach based on language's profound connection to the human body and subjectivity. Yet if McEwan understands terrorism as posing a unique threat to masculinity, this alerts us to the fact that he shares conceptual ground with the discourses about terrorism that infiltrated the global sphere more thoroughly than ever before after September 11th. As we examine McEwan's reworking of the connection between language and the material, between text and world, we must ask how far this shared ground leads McEwan to rearticulate conservative notions of identity and thus limit the ethical nature of his approach. In other words, how far can rethinking what it is to be a good man in a world where bad men exist help us develop a ethical gesture that disrupts the cycle of violence?

Apprehensive Language

Ian McEwan's oeuvre has repeatedly explored the ability of language and narrative to describe our experiences of the real world. Amigoni provides us with a particularly evocative term for describing the interest in the relationship between the word and the world in his reading of McEwan's *Enduring Love* (1997). Like *Saturday*, this earlier novel also pits scientific

⁴¹¹ Ian McEwan, *Saturday* (London: Vintage Books, 2006), Preface.

and literary disciplines against one another, drawing into question the ability of either narrative convention to relay any story. Amigoni develops this overt concern with narrative by citing Joe Rose, the scientific journalist who is *Enduring Love*'s protagonist. As Rose attempts to write, he is overwhelmed by anxiety:

These words referred to a dog when I wrote them, but re-reading them, I began to fret. I couldn't find the word for what I felt. It was clearly not true that without language there is no thought. I possessed a thought, a feeling, a sensation, and I was looking for its word . . . Fear was too focused, it had an object. Dread was too strong. Fear of the future. Apprehension then. Yes, there is was, approximately. It was apprehension.⁴¹²

Amigoni insightfully argues that 'apprehension' is not only the word Rose is looking for; it is the term that characterises Rose's entire encounter with language. For Amigoni, this brief passage invokes all the nuances of 'apprehension': an arresting of meaning, a form of comprehension, and a kind of anxiety. Rose's fretting over finding the correct word demonstrates that 'the challenge of representing material 'sensation' registered in the body is no simple task of fitting the word to the thought.'⁴¹³ There is no simple correlation between a word and a thought, thus there is no guarantee that one's words will apprehend one's meaning. The uncertainty leads to a general anxiety about language, leaving the whole process of writing inflected with apprehension in all its forms.

Amigoni's formulation becomes particularly interesting when thinking about *Saturday*'s setting in the wake of the experience of terror induced by the September 11th attacks. Rose's apprehension begins as he tries to connect thought, word, and bodily sensation, in an attempt to capture what he feels at a material level. This moment shows the apprehensive relationship to language beginning prior to narrative, emerging instead from a fundamental anxiety about language's ability to 'apprehend' anything. Through the figure of Rose, McEwan locates this apprehension as a specifically literary anxiety, for until this moment, Rose's scientific background has led him to assume there is a transparent relationship between signifier and signified. Interestingly, it is immediately after he has witnessed the tragic death of another man that this assumption begins to unravel, suggesting that Rose's apprehension about language is directly connected to this experience. If being present at the brutal and unexpected demise of another brings about Rose's literary anxiety, can we read McEwan as suggesting there is an inherent connection between terrorism and literature?

⁴¹² Ian McEwan, *Enduring Love* (London: Vintage, 1998), 43.

⁴¹³ David Amigoni, 'The Luxury of Storytelling: Science, Literature and Cultural Contest in Ian McEwan's Narrative Practice', in *Literature and Science*, ed. Sharon Ruston (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2008), 153.

Just as it is Rose's doubts about his prose being about a dog that alert him to the apprehensive relationship language has to the world, Maurice Blanchot uses a cat to illustrate why literary language has particular cause to make us anxious. For Blanchot, 'everyday language' maintains the claim that language 'calls a cat a cat, as if the living cat and its name were identical.'⁴¹⁴ Literature, by contrast, aims to replicate the movement that made language possible. In Blanchot's terms, non-literary language assumes an ability to grasp the world efficiently:

Language is reassuring and disquieting at the same time. When we speak, we gain control over things with satisfying ease. I say, "This woman" and she is immediately available to me, I push her away, I bring her close, she is everything I want her to be, she becomes the place in which the most surprising sorts of transformations occur and actions unfold: speech is life's ease and security. We cannot do anything with an object that has no name.⁴¹⁵

Like Irigaray, Blanchot argues that the language, the symbolic, puts the world at our disposal in a way that puts us at ease with it. But as for Irigaray, Blanchot recognises that this comforting control is gained at the expense of that which is named:

A word may give me its meaning, but first it suppresses it. For me to be able to say "This woman," I must first somehow take her flesh-and-blood reality away from her, cause her to be absent, annihilate her. The word gives me the being, but gives it to me deprived of being. The word is the absence of that being, its nothingness, what is left of it when it has lost being – the very fact that it does not exist. Considered in this light speaking is a curious right.⁴¹⁶

Blanchot thus coincides with Irigaray in arguing that language substitutes a word or sign for the flesh-and-blood reality of its referent. It is no surprise then, that Blanchot locates language as having its origins in 'a sort of immense hecatomb,' as everything must be annihilated, or sacrificed, in order to make everything absent, and thus open to representation. For Blanchot as for Irigaray, language is based on the forgetting of life, and as such is inextricably conjoined with death:

Of course my language does not kill anyone. And yet, when I say, "This woman," real death has been announced and is already present in my language; my language means that this person, whilst here right now, can be detached from herself, removed from her existence and her presence, and suddenly plunged into a nothingness in which there is no existence or presence; my language essentially signifies the possibility of this destruction; it is a constant, bold allusion to such an event . . . if this woman were not really capable of dying, if she were not threatened by death at every moment of

⁴¹⁴ Maurice Blanchot, 'Literature and the Right to Death', in *The Work of Fire*, trans. Lydia Davis (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 1995), 325.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., 322.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.

her life, bound and joined to death by an essential bond, I would not be able to carry out that ideal negation, that deferred assassination which is what my language is.⁴¹⁷

Here, a crucial difference emerges between Blanchot and Irigaray's thought, for while Irigaray postulates that in cultivating sexual difference, we can develop symbolic cultures that correspond to and respect the living presence of the other, there is no such hope for Blanchot. Instead of remembering life, the woman's real presence only testifies to the certainty of death and it is this certainty that allows language to unfold.

Thus, literature has a very specific relationship to death for Blanchot. Again, while Irigaray's thinking opens up the possibility that literature can act as a space in which the symbolic can be played with, altered, opened up in a way that pre-figures change in our culture's imaginary, literature's play with language represents something very different for Blanchot. For him, literature strives to replicate the annihilation that permits language to exist, in order 'to become the revelation of what revelation destroys.'⁴¹⁸ Literature, in effect, causes the meaning of words to become absent so that all language is available to it, mimicking the overwriting of presence that creates language. This is a radical annihilation, depriving words and the world of stable meaning by co-opting the negation that gave birth to language.

Literature thus:

allies itself with the reality of language, it makes language into matter without contour, content without form, a force that is capricious and impersonal and says nothing, reveals nothing, simply announces – through its refusal to say anything – that it comes from night and will return to night.⁴¹⁹

In its appropriation of the movement that facilitates the creation of language, literature becomes dangerous, threatening to destabilise any claim language has to apprehend the world. Blanchot explicitly connects literature's negation of language to the Reign of Terror, as this was the revolutionary moment in which life achieved its goals by turning to death 'in order to gain from death the possibility of speaking and the truth of speech.'⁴²⁰ Hence Blanchot embeds literature's radical annihilation in the moment which gave birth to the concept of terrorism. The consequence is, as Thurschwell puts it, 'that literary writing is itself, in its essence, already terrorist.'⁴²¹ What is more, the writer becomes an agent of revolutionary negation in Blanchot's terms. The writer's capacity to imagine any world, any possibility, allots

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., 323. There are some interesting echoes here of Barthes' reading of photography in *Camera Lucida*, as the image simultaneously acts as a token of presence, and announces the death of what it portrays.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., 327.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., 330.

⁴²⁰ Ibid., 322.

⁴²¹ Adam Thurschwell, 'Writing and Terror: Don DeLillo on the Task of Literature After 9/11', *Law and Literature* 19, no. 2 (2007): Abstract.

them a freedom they do not have in actuality. Redfield argues that in Blanchot's formulation, the writer too becomes a radically negative figure in taking on this mantle of freedom: '[g]lobal and immediate, the writer's sovereign negation negates nothing, because it offers everything instantly.'⁴²² The writer's freedom to imagine the world is therefore as dangerous as the literature he produces, annihilating this world in order to write another.

Blanchot thus figures literature as replicating the repression of the material that allows a phallic symbolic to unfold. This becomes particularly interesting given that McEwan has chosen to frame *Saturday* with an epigraph which explicitly ponders what it is to be a man in a particular historical moment. Be it conscious or not, it is this proximity between writer and revolutionary, author and terrorist, that arguably lies beneath the anxieties about language that permeate *Saturday*. As we examine how McEwan figures the relationship between language and identity, and locates these figurings in a specific historical moment, it becomes clear that *Saturday* is a novel in which McEwan attempts to foreclose the terroristic capacity of literature. In the face of the deviant masculinity that emerged with the September 11th attacks, it becomes necessary to make a clear distinction between the self and the Other, between author and terrorist. *Saturday*, then, is a novel in which McEwan attempts to draw the moral distinction that separates good masculinity from bad, specifically by reasserting the symbolic's umbilical attachment to the world. For if Blanchot ultimately concludes that '[e]very time we speak, we make words into monsters with two faces, one being reality, physical presence, and the other meaning, ideal absence,'⁴²³ it is this monstrosity that we see McEwan battling against in *Saturday*.

The Problem of Reference

In her analysis of *Saturday*, Laura Salisbury observes that within the novel, 'the events of September 11, 2001, the 'War on Terror', and the largest political demonstration in the U.K.'s history against which Henry's narrative is initially staged, all gradually fade out . . . recede in favour of the 'backbone' of the plot.'⁴²⁴ Set in London, the novel opens as the protagonist, Henry Perowne, wakes early to witness a burning plane cross the dawn sky. We then follow Perowne through his day, which is disrupted as he attempts to avoid the protest march against the plans to invade Iraq. Driving down a side-road, Perowne collides with another car and is aggressively confronted by its occupants. Perowne, a neurosurgeon, realises

⁴²² Marc Redfield, *The Rhetoric of Terror: Reflections on 9/11 and the War on Terror* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 82.

⁴²³ Blanchot, 'Right to Death', 328.

⁴²⁴ Laura Salisbury, 'Narration and Neurology: Ian McEwan's Mother Tongue', *Textual Practice* 25, no. 5 (2010): 883 and 908–909.

the ring-leader Baxter has Huntington's disease and defuses the situation by using this knowledge. We then follow Perowne through the rest of the day as he prepares for a small family reunion that evening, a reunion which nearly ends in tragedy as Baxter invades the Perowne household with a knife. On one level, then, as the day progresses the plot moves from a sudden and immediate engagement with the complexities of the contemporary geo-political climate to focus increasingly on the personal. Arguably, much of the criticism produced regarding *Saturday* echoes this movement, frequently opening with an acknowledgement that the events listed by Salisbury are clearly present in the novel, before quietly relegating their presence to the status of a 'backdrop' as they insert the novel into the larger narrative of McEwan's literary career. There seems to be an implicit acceptance that in stating that '[h]owever much *Saturday* captures the mood of post-9/11 anxiety, its central ideas are drawn from other sources,'⁴²⁵ one has sufficiently engaged with the explicit presence of these events within the text. Just as the novel introduces these elements into the text at the beginning and then gradually brings Perowne's private life and thoughts to the fore, so readings of *Saturday* mention the overt historical context before focusing on a plot that 'threatens to be Henry Perowne's own personal 9/11, bringing with it a convulsive disruption of his domestic space'⁴²⁶ or inserting the novel into a narrative of the 'evolution of McEwan's post-9/11 thought'.⁴²⁷

While these readings provide some excellent insights into both the thought that underpins McEwan's work and the myriad nuances at work within *Saturday*, relegating the broader context explicitly invoked in the novel to background noise is to miss one of the key questions set up by the novel. *Saturday* is widely recognised and read as continuing McEwan's well-documented involvement in the 'two cultures' and 'third culture' debates,⁴²⁸ in which thinkers such as John Brockman, Richard Dawkins, and other members of the Reality Club assert that scientific discovery should serve as the foundation for ethical thought, meaning the Humanities have an obligation to reflect the truths science unveils. Indeed, as Marcus puts it, *Saturday* unambiguously sets up 'the competing claims of science/medicine and literature to

⁴²⁵ Dominic Head, *Ian McEwan* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 182.

⁴²⁶ Michael Ross, 'On A Darkling Planet: Ian McEwan's "Saturday" and the Condition of England', *Twentieth Century Literature* 54, no. 1 (2008): paragraph 5.

⁴²⁷ Sebastian Groes, 'Ian McEwan and the Modernist Consciousness of the City in Saturday', in *Ian McEwan: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, ed. Sebastian Groes (London; New York: Continuum, 2009), 102–103.

⁴²⁸ For McEwan, *Saturday* as a third culture novel, see; Salisbury, 'Narration'; Amigoni, 'Luxury of Storytelling'; and Head, *McEwan*; For McEwan as a third culture author, see Ian McEwan, 'Literature, Science and Human Nature', in *The Literary Animal: Evolution and the Nature of Narrative*, ed. Jonathan Gottschall and David Sloan Wilson (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2005), 5–19; Or Jonathan Greenberg, 'Why Can't Biologists Read Poetry? Ian McEwan's Enduring Love', *Twentieth Century Literature* 53, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 93–126.

'truth''⁴²⁹ in the form of the relationships the neurosurgeon Henry has with his poet and 'literate, too literate daughter Daisy,'⁴³⁰ and to a certain extent, his father-in-law, John Grammaticus, an acclaimed poet. But as Childs notes, *Saturday* is McEwan's first novel to engage fully with the present,⁴³¹ be that in terms of narrative structure or historical context. Taking this observation together with the decision to openly draw the September 11th attacks and their political aftermath into the text, it becomes appropriate to ask why it is that the 'post-9/11 climate' proves so pertinent to McEwan's interest in and representation of the 'two cultures' and 'third culture' debates? There is no immediately apparent connection, and yet something within our understanding of the attacks, their aftermath and the representation of them seems to make the link so apparent that it does not merit examination. Somewhere along the line, the religion-versus-rationality, science-versus-art, nature-versus-nurture dichotomies have blurred, meaning that attacks by religious extremists seem an obvious backdrop for McEwan to situate his representation of the third culture debate against.

To read the novel purely in terms of McEwan's thought is to ignore the emphasis placed on September 11th as an era-defining instant in the novel's opening pages. As a flaming object passes across the dark sky above London, Perowne is quickly alerted to the nature of the burning object as 'a low rumbling sound, gentle thunder gathering in volume . . . tells him everything.'⁴³² Realising it is a burning plane, Perowne feels that 'the spectacle has the familiarity of a recurrent dream,'⁴³³ reflecting on his own in-flight fantasies:

Plastic fork in hand, he often wonders how it might go – the screaming in the cabin partly muffled by that deadening acoustic, the fumbling in bags for phones and last words, the airline staff in their terror clinging to remembered fragments of procedure, the levelling smell of shit. But the scene construed from outside, from afar like this, is also familiar. It's already almost eighteen months since half the planet watched, and watched again the unseen captives driven through the sky to the slaughter, at which time there gathered round the innocent silhouette of any jet plane a novel association. Everyone agrees, airliners look different in the sky these days, predatory or doomed.⁴³⁴

Right from the novel's opening, September 11th, 2001, is figured as a defining experience. Not only do the opening pages of the novel include the striking image of a distressed plane flying ominously over the centre of a city, Perowne's thoughts demonstrate just how pervasive the impact of the attacks is, entering into both his daydreams and his everyday awareness of what planes 'should' sound and look like, as well as altering everyone's perceptions of airliners.

⁴²⁹ Laura Marcus, 'Ian McEwan's Modernist Time: "Atonement" and "Saturday"', in *Ian McEwan: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, ed. Sebastian Groes (London; New York: Continuum, 2009), 87.

⁴³⁰ McEwan, *Saturday*, 6.

⁴³¹ Peter Childs, *The Fiction of Ian McEwan* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 146.

⁴³² McEwan, *Saturday*, 14.

⁴³³ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*, 15–16.

Perhaps it is because the peculiar familiarity Perowne senses as he watches the flaming plane make its way towards Heathrow captures a sense of the peculiar familiarity we now have with the footage, stories and repercussions of September 11th that this extraordinary opening scene is not given the same credit for shaping the novel as McEwan's other exceptional openings. For while critics draw parallels between *Enduring Love*, *The Child In Time* (1987) and *Atonement* (2001) in terms of narrative structures, characters, use of scientific rhetoric, and the apparent fascination with the nature of the relationship between narrative and truth, the opening events in each of these novels are persistently given credit for shaping the rest of the narrative in a way that *Saturday's* burning plane is not. Given that McEwan sets the novel on the day in which the largest protest the U.K. had ever witnessed took place – February 15th, 2003 – in the city through which the biggest march took place, it becomes even more surprising that the September 11th attacks are so easily understood as a background element. For although the protests were against the U.S.-led plans to invade Iraq, it was apparent that the Bush administration had, at worst, partly built their case for war on completely unfounded claims that linked Saddam Hussein's regime to al-Qaeda; and at best were attempting to make use of the post-September 11th climate to gain support for their plans. Thus, the specific historical setting of the novel ties the text to the attacks of 2001. Given this specificity, rather than splitting away recognisable patterns within *Saturday* and inserting them into other pre-established McEwan narratives, should we not instead be reading these well-established McEwan themes as being placed in a dialogue with September 11th and its aftermath?

The opening description of the burning plane provides a hint as to how the attacks on the World Trade Center relate to McEwan's more familiar concerns with the relationship between science and literature. Again, as Perowne watches the plane's descent, he cannot help but draw parallels with watching the attacks unfold:

That is the other familiar element – the horror of what he can't see. Catastrophe observed from a safe distance. Watching death on a large scale, but seeing no one die. No blood, no screams, no human figures at all, and into this emptiness, the obliging imagination set free.⁴³⁵

These words echo phrases McEwan himself has repeated in articles he produced in the days immediately after the attacks, and in later interviews.⁴³⁶ Perowne locates the source of his horror as being the inability to see in detail what is unfolding as his distance from the events

⁴³⁵ Ibid., 16.

⁴³⁶ See Ian McEwan, 'Beyond Belief', *The Guardian* (London, September 12, 2001). and Ian McEwan, 'Faith and Doubt at Ground Zero', interview by Helen Whitney, Frontline, April 2002, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/faith/interviews/mcewan.html>.

allows his imagination free reign over them, for there is no bloody actuality to frame and limit the possibilities his own mind invents. Elsewhere McEwan has described this very distance as something that struck him as he watched the smoke billowing from the towers; '[i]t was that gap between what we really knew must be going on and the fact that you couldn't actually, in those first instances, see any human distress.'⁴³⁷ Terror emerges thanks to our knowledge of what must be happening and the distance that prevents us from confirming what we know: the space between knowing and seeing allows the mind to fill in the gaps. The gap between the brutality of the event and the witness is thus what imbues the event with terror.

As the plane continues to blaze its way across the early morning sky, Perowne's thoughts enter into the space between himself and what he is witnessing, and it is in the train of these thoughts that we see traces of what constitutes the terror of this gap. As the 'plane emerges from the trees, crosses a gap and disappears behind the Post Office Tower' Perowne contemplates the temptation to read the presence of 'a hidden order, an external intelligence which wants to show or tell him something of significance' as being behind his somnambulant rise from bed, a temptation that he regards as foreign to his understanding of the world, but that he recognises in others as the 'primitive thinking of the supernaturally inclined,' thinking that his psychiatric colleagues 'call a problem . . . of reference.'⁴³⁸ Perowne hypothesises that such problem could lie behind the fire he is now witnessing, which in turn would lead to 'another problem of reference' as the passengers on-board pray 'to their own god for intercession.'⁴³⁹ Finally, as the plane disappears from view, this chain of thought culminates in Perowne's recollection of a 'famous thought experiment':

A cat, Schrödinger's Cat, hidden from view in a covered box, is either still alive, or has just been killed by a randomly activated hammer hitting a vial of poison. Until the observer lifts the cover, from the box, both possibilities, alive cat and dead cat, exist side by side, in parallel universes, equally real. At the point at which the lid is lifted from the box and the cat examined, a quantum wave of probability collapses. None of this has ever made any sense to him at all. No human sense. Surely another example of a problem of reference.⁴⁴⁰

Despite claiming that this experiment has never made any sense to him, something in Perowne's understanding of this experiment leads him to link the problem of reference to what he has just witnessed. An unarticulated connection is made between the freedom of Perowne's imagination to fill in the spaces he cannot see and the various examples of

⁴³⁷ McEwan 'Faith and Doubt'.

⁴³⁸ McEwan, *Saturday*, 17.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

problematic referentiality that enter the text. Yet, even as this connection remains below the surface of the text, Perowne is still quick to explicitly dismiss it:

To Henry, it seems beyond the requirements of proof: a result, a consequence, exists separately in the world, independent of himself, known to others, awaiting his discovery. What then collapses will be his own ignorance. Whatever the score, it is already chalked up. And whatever the passengers' destination, whether they are frightened and safe, or dead, they will have arrived by now.⁴⁴¹

Just as Perowne initially dismisses his initial concern that 'there's something he should be doing'⁴⁴² by imagining the actions of others called to duty by the burning plane, so too he concludes that the fates of both the cat and the passengers on the plane are entirely independent of his knowledge. Perowne is sure these events will reach a conclusion regardless of whether he knows about it or not. To think otherwise is to approach an 'excess of the subjective, the ordering of the world in line with your needs, an inability to contemplate your own unimportance.'⁴⁴³ Yet while Perowne feels it is 'beyond the requirements of proof' that there is physical reality independent of the limits of his perception, this knowledge does not prevent his imagination from attempting to fill in the gap between what he has physical evidence for and what he presumes he knows.

It is not only the obliging imagination's willingness to fill in hypothetical details that makes the space between referent and representation problematic for Perowne. Just as the burning plane initially turns his thoughts to the problem of reference, so later, it serves to highlight to Perowne the possibilities for manipulation that the instability of reference permits. As the incident is reported on the television news, it is 'made real at last, the plane, askew on the runway, apparently intact . . . Schrödinger's dead cat is alive after all.'⁴⁴⁴ This realisation leads Perowne to recognise the risk that lies in such reliance on the media for verification:

This past hour he's been in a state of wild unreason, in a folly of overinterpretation. It doesn't console him that anyone in these times, standing at the window in his place, might have leaped to the same conclusions. Misunderstanding is general all over the world. How can we trust ourselves? He sees now the details he half-ignored in order to nourish his fears: that the plane was not being driven into a public building, that it was making a regular, controlled descent, that it was on a well-used flight path – none of this fitted the general unease. He told himself there were two possible outcomes – the cat was dead or alive. But he'd already voted for the dead, when he should have sensed it straight away – a simple accident in the making. Not an attack on our whole way of life then.⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴¹ Ibid., 19.

⁴⁴² Ibid., 17.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., 35.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., 39.

The television images of the plane on the ground act as the evidence that Perowne's senses were missing before. Yet he realises he did in fact have all the evidence to hand as he witnessed the event; in a Baudrillardian gesture, he simply ignored certain details in order to insert what he was seeing into the 'general unease' of the global climate. This neurosurgeon who prides himself on his observational rationale realises that he too is capable of ignoring the evidence in favour of an *a priori* understanding. Moreover, he locates his willingness to read the evidence in this way as originating with the media itself. Just as the media tells Perowne how significant an incident is based on the order in which stories are reported, so too the global 'general unease' and 'misunderstanding' that shape Perowne's reaction have their roots in the media's representation of events. As the full facts about what he has witnessed come to fruition later in the day, Perowne feels his initial responses to the burning plane are:

part of the new order, this narrowing of mental freedom, of his right to roam. Not so long ago his thoughts ranged more unpredictably, over a longer list of subjects. He suspects he's becoming a dupe, the willing, febrile consumer of news fodder, opinion, speculation and of all the crumbs the authorities let fall.⁴⁴⁶

Through persistent exposure and reliance on the media's representation of world events, Perowne has 'lost the habits of scepticism . . . he isn't thinking clearly, and just as bad, he senses he isn't thinking independently.'⁴⁴⁷ The combination of terror and media representation leave Perowne unable to think for himself, rendering him part of the faceless audience that terrorism discourses rely on. As such, Perowne becomes a member of a Baudrillardian audience, unable to respond to events in a spontaneous or independent way.

This becomes particularly apparent in Perowne's first encounter with Baxter. As Perowne watches Baxter and his two accomplices approach, he becomes aware that:

He is cast in a role, and there's no way out. This, as people like to say, is urban drama. A century of movies and half a century of television have rendered the matter insincere. It is pure artifice . . . Someone is going to have to impose his will and win, and the other is going to give way. Popular culture has worn this matter smooth with reiteration . . . Furthermore, nothing can be predicted, but everything, as soon as it happens, will seem to fit.⁴⁴⁸

The history of media representations of male confrontation within an urban setting immediately limits the possible responses available to Perowne in this situation, either because the repeated representations have set up a series of cultural 'rules as elaborate as the *politesse* of the Versailles court,' or because the reiteration has smoothed a path of thought so frictionless that it is impossible for Perowne to gain enough purchase on his situation to think

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., 180.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., 181.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., 86 – 87.

his way off the beaten path. This moment of violence becomes a Baudrillardian 'artifice' before it has even occurred, as it is pre-figured by images of male confrontation, and afterwards, will fit a recognisable, pre-established trope of urban drama. More than this, pre-established representation means that violence becomes inevitable regardless of the specifics of the situation, for just as Perowne focused in on certain aspects of the burning plane in order to insert it into an established pattern of understanding, so too all the men present on University Street translate certain key elements of their surroundings to insert themselves into a recognisable scenario. Representation, then, has the potential to come between the subject and the world in such a way as to limit or dictate how the subject interacts with that world. Here, Perowne's thinking echoes that of terrorism discourses, presuming that media representation has the capacity to reduce the individual's capacity to respond, as well as encouraging the perpetuation of violence.

Perowne's personal experience thus suggests that it is necessary to resist the capacity of representation to prescribe the individual's understanding of the world, creating an undifferentiated herd instinct. Indeed, *Saturday* suggests it is precisely because representations have such reductive power that our use of language should be shaped by an understanding of moral obligation, as we shall see. But if Perowne's encounters with violence are designed to be read in relation to the post-September 11th climate, what does McEwan set up as a means to resist such reduction to a group-mind in the face of media representation? Specifically, he gives us the individual mind, and it is the connection between the individual mind and language that works to produce McEwan's rethinking of identity and ethics in the presence of the violent Other.

The Slice -of- Mind Novel

Saturday is widely recognised as participating in a tradition of 'slice-of-life' literary fiction, with the use of free indirect discourse and the twenty-four hour time frame most frequently leading to comparisons with Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922).⁴⁴⁹ Head, however, argues that McEwan is not simply continuing the work of his predecessors, as some have suggested, nor providing a critique of the modernist project. Rather, Head suggests that McEwan is 'trying to produce . . . a diagnostic 'slice-of-mind' novel – working towards the literary equivalent of a CT scan.'⁴⁵⁰ Whether or not this attempt is entirely successful is questionable in Head's view, but nonetheless, '[s]tylistically . . .

⁴⁴⁹ See for example Marcus, 'Modernist Time', 95; and Groes, 'Modernist Consciousness', 105.

⁴⁵⁰ Head, *McEwan*, 192.

the novel makes a bold attempt to engage with [the] immediacy of human consciousness.⁴⁵¹ One of the consequences of the use of free indirect discourse to generate this immediacy is a sense of completeness that makes it difficult to move beyond the limits of the text. In reading *Saturday*, we are carried along with Perowne's thought processes, following the line and flow of his internal arguments, and thus not only have access to the information and reasoning that underpins his thinking, but are given the sense that everything available to Perowne has been taken into account.

This becomes particularly apparent when comparing the thorough, articulate account of Perowne's meeting with Professor Taleb and his ensuing pro-war stance with his fragmented debate with Daisy over the impending invasion of Iraq.⁴⁵² When immersed in Perowne's thoughts, the flow of his reasoning brings the reader along with him, or in Ross's terms, 'McEwan's use of a unitary center of perception . . . situates the reader within a discursive universe that is relentlessly judicious, probing, and "superior."'⁴⁵³ When vocalising his opinions, however, the logic behind Perowne's position no longer seamlessly leads us to a conclusion. In producing a slice-of-life novel, McEwan, according to Head, 'has adopted a style that gets very close to the experience of reading,⁴⁵⁴ or perhaps to put it another way, has adopted a style that mimics the reader's experience of thought in such a way as to generate a closed-circuit between reader and text. To read Perowne's thoughts is to think through them with him. This hermetic relationship is reinforced by Perowne's awareness of other points of view, and even by his own moments of doubt. The fact that he acknowledges that he 'might have been with' the anti-war protestors 'in spirit at least . . . if Professor Taleb hadn't needed an aneurysm clipped,⁴⁵⁵ and that '[w]henver he talks to Jay, Henry finds himself tending towards the anti-war camp'⁴⁵⁶ demonstrate a degree of awareness and flexibility that reinforces the feeling that Perowne's final opinions have been arrived at after carefully considering all angles. It is perhaps no surprise then that in discussing the novel, the overriding temptation becomes one of engaging with Perowne directly, by addressing the very issues his thoughts circle around on this particular Saturday. Taken alongside the tendency to read McEwan's work as part of his own literary history, this frequently produces critiques that, as Hillard notes, 'take for granted that Perowne speaks for McEwan,' a reading that Hillard also

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² McEwan, *Saturday*, 62–64 and 186–192 respectively.

⁴⁵³ Ross, 'Darkling Planet', paragraph 24.

⁴⁵⁴ Head, *McEwan*, 193.

⁴⁵⁵ McEwan, *Saturday*, 72.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid., 100.

notes McEwan does not necessarily discourage.⁴⁵⁷ If we accept that McEwan is attempting to produce a slice-of-mind novel, building on the modernist slice-of-life text as exemplified by *Mrs Dalloway*, which portrays 'an 'ordinary' mind on an ordinary day in order to explore wider social, cultural and political issues,'⁴⁵⁸ then it becomes crucial to move beyond the seductive completeness of Perowne's train of thought and ask instead: why examine this particular mind at this particular moment?

To begin to answer this question, first it is necessary to ask what concept of mind the text presents us with. There are at least two strands to the text's modelling of the mind operating within the novel, one at the diegetic level of the text presented to us by Perowne's knowledge of the brain, and one the text itself presents us with in representing Perowne's thought patterns. Indeed, I would suggest that it is possible to link these two models to the two primary encounters with 'exceptional' brains within the text, in the form of Baxter's Huntington's disease and Lily Perowne's dementia. Although both minds are unravelling because of disease, the effects of their particular disease bring about different movements into oblivion, and it is the form of this movement that provides us with a model of what the 'normal' mind is. Specifically, Baxter's condition serves as an exemplar of Perowne's understanding of the mind, while his mother's dementia aligns itself more with the literary representation provided by the text, as we shall see.

For Perowne, Baxter's condition is an example of 'how the brilliant machinery of being is undone by the tiniest of faulty cogs, the insidious whisper of ruin, a single bad idea lodged in every cell, on every chromosome four.'⁴⁵⁹ More specifically, his situation is described as 'beyond pity. There are so many ways the brain can let you down. Like an expensive car, it's intricate, but mass-produced nevertheless, with more than six billion in circulation.'⁴⁶⁰ The suggestion here is that the brain is machine-like, both in its operation and in its mass-produced nature, and thus is made vulnerable both by its susceptibility to mechanical failure and the potential for errors in the process of mass-production. Further, this model of the brain permits Perowne a professional detachment; there is no point in pitying a machine for having an inbuilt flaw. Thinking in mechanical terms about the brain permits a mechanical or scientific detachment.

⁴⁵⁷ Molly Clark Hillard, "When Desert Armies Stand Ready to Fight": Re-Reading McEwan's *Saturday* and Arnold's "Dover Beach", *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and History of Ideas* 6, no. 1 (2008): 186. Like DeLillo in *Falling Man*, several phrases and ideas that have appeared in articles and interviews with McEwan concerning the 9/11 attacks and post 9/11 global politics are echoed in *Saturday*. Similarly, McEwan has let it be known in several interviews that Perowne's Fitzrovia home is actually his own.

⁴⁵⁸ Groes, 'Modernist Consciousness', 106.

⁴⁵⁹ McEwan, *Saturday*, 94.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 98.

This is not the case when it comes to Perowne's mother, Lily. Although Perowne traces the medical effects of dementia, his observations are inflected with an awareness of precisely what it is that is being lost through the damage to brain matter: '[t]he disease proceeds by tiny unnoticed strokes in small blood vessels in the brain. Cumulatively, the infarcts cause cognitive decline by disrupting the neural nets. She unravels in little steps.'⁴⁶¹ Material deterioration equates directly to loss of individuality. The breakdown of brain matter is the breakdown of subjectivity, as the small movements of the disease through the brain are mirrored in the 'little steps' through which the subject loses any cohesive identity. Indeed, the damage to Lily's brain reveals precisely where subjectivity, as human consciousness, is located:

Damage from the small-vessel clotting tends to accumulate in the white matter and destroy the mind's connectivity. Along the way, well before the process is complete, Lily is able to deliver her rambling treatises, her nonsense monologues with touching seriousness.⁴⁶²

The process that has yet to be complete is the total erasure of Lily's consciousness, a process so comprehensive as to deprive her of the ability to express 'herself'. As it is the mind's connectivity that is being destroyed by the progress of the disease, this suggests that her subjectivity lies within these connections. But it is the eventual loss of language that represents the final, absolute destruction of the subject. For now, Lily's nonsensical communication maintains a semblance of individual identity, for Lily if for not for her son:

She doesn't doubt herself at all. Nor does she think he's unable to follow her. The structure of her sentences is intact, and the moods which inflect her various descriptions make sense.⁴⁶³

As long as the neuronal matter in her brain remains intact enough to permit her access to language, Lily can communicate and in doing so, articulate some sense of 'herself,' albeit an identity stripped down to the bare minimum of subjectivity, able to do little more than imbue a grammatical structure with some sense of mood. Once the connectivity of the brain is destroyed beyond a certain point, even this rudimentary language will be lost, and with it the last vestige of subjectivity.

In Baxter, we are given 'a special case', a genetic exception in which the error in the production of his genetic make-up means that his identity is determined by his body to such a degree that his future appears fated:

It is written. No amount of love, drugs, Bible classes or prison sentencing can cure Baxter or shift him from his course. It's spelled out in fragile proteins, but it could be carved in stone, or tempered steel.⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., 162.

⁴⁶² Ibid.

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

Whereas Baxter is described as being completely at the mercy of his genetic condition, as his movements, moods, and behaviour are all part of the 'expression of his condition,'⁴⁶⁵ Lily's exceptional state suggests that, rather than consciousness being a fundamental expression of biological material, there is something in being able to express oneself that constitutes that consciousness. Thus, in Baxter we are presented with a model of the mind as pure expression of the code contained within our genes, as consciousness and subjectivity written in the cellular matter of the body. Lily's condition, by contrast, introduces an ambiguity into this relation, as it is the ability to express herself that is exposed as being vulnerable to her material existence; her access to language is fundamental to her subjectivity, and the deterioration of her language is as much a loss of her consciousness as is the loss of neuronal connections.

Despite recognising how pivotal his mother's access to language is for her sense of self, Perowne reads the ambiguity this introduces into his concept of the mind as being an illustration of what contemporary neuroscience has yet to discover:

For all the recent advances, it's still not known how this well-protected one kilogram or so of cells actually encodes information, how it holds experiences, memories, dreams and intentions. He doesn't doubt that in years to come, the coding mechanism will be known . . . Just like the digital codes of replicating life held within DNA, the brain's fundamental secret will be laid open one day. But even when it has, the wonder will remain, that mere wet stuff can make this bright inward cinema of thought, of sight and sound and touch bound into a vivid illusion of an instantaneous present, with a self, another brightly wrought illusion, hovering like a ghost at its centre.⁴⁶⁶

While Perowne acknowledges that there is a difference between the brain and the mind, he has no doubt that the mind is shaped entirely by the 'mere wet stuff' of the brain. Again, despite the implicit recognition in this passage of the significance of representation in forming consciousness, in the 'inward cinema,' the 'vivid illusion of an instantaneous present' and the ghost-like self, Perowne does not allow room in his thinking for the possibility that 'representation' might in turn sculpt the mind, in direct contradiction to his experience of the media's influence on his day-to-day thinking. He remains a steadfast 'professional reductionist' who 'can't help thinking' people's lives are determined by invisible folds and kinks of character, written in code, at the level of molecules.⁴⁶⁷ Thus, while the temptation is to read the contrast between Perowne the neuroscientist and his artistic offspring as representing the crucial debate within the text, in the pairing of Baxter and Lily, McEwan takes the science/art

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid., 210. Italics in original.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., 210.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid., 254–255.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., 273.

debate beyond the conflicting methodologies and into a discussion of the kinds of subjectivity each approach allows us to articulate. We shall return to Lily and the relationship between language and body her disease articulates, but for now, we shall turn to the kind of subjectivity and ethical approach offered up by Perowne's professional reductionism.

Consciousness, subjectivity, and identity all become expressions of the material reality of the brain in Perowne's model, with the mind being a mysterious means of facilitating a connection between the interiority of material existence and the external world – mysterious yet undoubtedly the result of complex interactions at a molecular level. Interestingly, Perowne feels that even when science has laid bare how the microscopic biological workings of the brain dictate our lives, we will still be left in awe of the brain's workings, as 'wonder will remain.' There is an intriguing tension here with the sensation of terror, as both wonder and terror emerge in the space between knowing what must be happening and seeing it for oneself. This tension comes to the fore as we explore how Perowne's turn to the body for articulating subjectivity differs from that of Irigaray's sensible transcendental. Perowne's modelling of the mind has interesting parallels with Lévi-Strauss's understanding of the brain as the place of the subject, and it is here we again find the crucial difference between the scientist's turn to the body and Irigaray's own. Perowne believes – or knows – that who we are is determined by our genes, right down to the position we occupy in society,⁴⁶⁸ while Irigaray argues that we need to recognise that the subject is always sexuate, a defining characteristic that is ultimately initiated at a genetic level. But while both positions agree that the material nature of the body is central in constituting subjectivity, the manner in which this material is approached means that Perowne and Irigaray draw very different conclusions as to how the body constructs identity, and what precisely is constructed. For Perowne, the account of 'how matter becomes conscious' may be beyond his imagining, 'but he knows it will come . . . as long as the scientists and institutions remain in place, the explanations will refine themselves into an irrefutable truth about consciousness . . . That's the only kind of faith he has.'⁴⁶⁹ The brain, as a material substance, will ultimately give up its secrets under the scrutiny of science, providing us once and for all with a definitive, empirical, observable truth about what it is to be human. The brain is taken in isolation, 'laid open' like a dissected cadaver in order to display its inner workings. Perowne pursues a reductionist line of thought emblematic of a phallic scientific tradition that Irigaray describes as 'a masculine anatomic science, usually thought

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., 254–255. It is no coincidence that Perowne identifies this as his only 'faith,' as we shall see.

starting from cadavers or from animal experimentation.⁴⁷⁰ Thus Perowne's conception of the brain echoes Lévi-Strauss, rendering the brain as biological matter in isolation, a master organ removed from the very body over which it has mastery.

Perowne's 'faith' in modern scientific practice imbricates his understanding of subjectivity with the ideals of phallic masculinity as he figures the brain and the mind, and in his attempts to 'find a morality, an ethics down among the enzymes and amino acids when the general taste is for looking in the other direction?'⁴⁷¹ The brain is a machine, a computer, highly-specialised matter that requires similarly highly-specialised machines to decode that which it has encoded. The self is an immaterial illusion, haunting the centre of the machine, a disembodied observer, whose true nature can only be revealed and defined by the detached, objective, observant scientist. Not only, then, is the robot a Straussian robot, the self a Cartesian ghost in the machine, consciousness is only knowable by the few specialists equipped to know the brain in its entirety, installing the neuroscientist as the epistemological master of what it is to be human thanks to his expertise in atomising the body's materiality. It is no surprise then that, in Perowne's frequent revisiting of moral questions, the microscopic material of life secures his ethics. Moreover, Perowne's turn to the world of neurons and genetics as determining subjectivity coincides with a Darwinian interpretation of human existence. When reflecting on Larkin's musing that he would 'make use of water' if constructing a religion, Perowne posits that:

he'd make use of evolution. What better creation myth? An unimaginable sweep of time, numberless generations spawning by infinitesimal steps complex living beauty out of inert matter, driven on by the blind furies of random mutation, natural selection and environmental change, with the tragedy of forms continually dying, and lately the wonder of minds emerging and with them, morality, love, art, cities – and the unprecedented bonus of this story happening to be demonstrably true.⁴⁷²

For Perowne, just as subjectivity is an expression of genetic material, so elements of human culture are all part of the process of physical evolution, capable of instilling wonder even when read as such. Perhaps it is inevitable then that Perowne's view of history is positivist, as he finds the claims of Daisy's university lecturers that 'the idea of progress old-fashioned and ridiculous' as an affront, a cause for 'indignation'.⁴⁷³ For Perowne, rejecting the idea of progress is to ignore the fact that life, in cities like London at least, 'has steadily

⁴⁷⁰ Irigaray, *Conversations*, 5. It is important to note that Irigaray is describing tendencies in the majority of modern scientific practices, not 'science' as a concept. She also recognises that certain branches of science are moving beyond the limitations of more established conceptual frameworks and methodologies.

⁴⁷¹ McEwan, *Saturday*, 91–92.

⁴⁷² *Ibid.*, 56.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*, 77.

improved over the centuries for most people, despite the junkies and beggars now.⁴⁷⁴ Such a rejection works against the evidence, as '[a]t every level, material, medical, intellectual, sensual, for most people life has improved.'⁴⁷⁵ The qualification Perowne feels he has to add, the 'despite' and 'for most' are telling. For as Perowne's reductionist thinking coincides with a particular reading of Darwinist evolution, our position within a society is determined by our genes, reifying society's structure by interpreting it as a consequence of evolution. This produces a specific conception of our responsibilities to one another within this 'natural' system. For when one's fate is determined by one's biology, it becomes apparent that '[n]o amount of social justice will cure or disperse this enfeebled army haunting the public places of every town,⁴⁷⁶ this army being those whose genetic make-up puts them at an evolutionary disadvantage. As Head observes, while Perowne repeatedly reflects that chance plays a deciding role in laying down one's genome, it is still an individual's genome that dictates who will be lost to the world of drug addiction and who will be pursuing an academic career and publishing poetry in Paris.⁴⁷⁷

Such a view produces a particular universalism that underpins Perowne's ethical formulations. As Salisbury puts it, 'Henry, it seems, *knows* that there is shared material substrate that subtends human behaviour.'⁴⁷⁸ But unlike Irigaray's sensible transcendental, Perowne's awareness of our incarnate nature leaves subjects potentially interchangeable: 'For a vertiginous moment Henry feels himself bound to the other man, as though on a seesaw with him, pinned to an axis that could tip them into each other's life.'⁴⁷⁹ The man in question is a street cleaner, facing the futile task of clearing a central London street during the protest march. Differentiated only by the minute molecular differences that swing the evolutionary balance, they are connected in a such a way as to be potentially interchangeable. Humanity, then, becomes universally bound to one-another through a shared molecular materiality which differentiates humanity via varying degrees of genetic fortune. In perceiving himself to be at the apex of this evolutionary chain, Perowne is conscious of his duties to those less fortunate than himself, as he reflects on his initial encounter with Baxter:

Did he, Henry Perowne, act unprofessionally, using his medical knowledge to undermine a man suffering from an neurodegenerative disorder? Yes. Did the threat of a beating excuse him? Yes, no, not entirely . . . he, Henry, was obliged, or forced, to abuse his own power – but he allowed himself to be placed in that position.⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., 77.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., 77.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., 272.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., 65.

⁴⁷⁸ Salisbury, 'Narration', 892. Italics in original.

⁴⁷⁹ McEwan, *Saturday*, 74.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., 111.

For Perowne, his genetically-determined lot in life has given him power over others, and despite Baxter's clear physical advantage over him (also genetically determined), Perowne reads himself as being the responsible party, depriving Baxter of a controlling stake in the situation. This is repeated later, as Perowne operates on Baxter and then decides to take it upon himself not to press charges, but instead to 'do what he can to make the patient comfortable' whilst at the same time ensuring he is securely in the system 'before he does more harm.'⁴⁸¹ Social responsibility becomes a matter of the Perownes of this world not abusing their advantageous position for their own ends, and instead managing those who are doomed from birth not to thrive, providing them with consolation whilst keeping them from doing harm:

You have to recognise bad luck when you see it, you have to look out for these people. Some you can prise from their addictions, others – all you can do is make them comfortable somehow, minimise their miseries.⁴⁸²

Watching 'the sort of person who can't earn a living, or resist another drink, or remember today what he resolved to do yesterday,'⁴⁸³ Perowne's thoughts tread the fine line between his reductionist analysis and the logic used by the tyrannical regimes of people he despises – Saddam Hussein, 'Hitler, Stalin, Mao'.⁴⁸⁴ But though Perowne's genetic determinism brings him perilously close to articulating something akin to eugenics, his is an ethics based on an understanding of the material gained through medical training. Thus, rather than merely condemning the weak to failure, Perowne's brand of reductionism is inflected with the values of 'the medical profession, governed by the Hippocratic oath, which obliges reverence of life, in a uniform and impersonal sense.'⁴⁸⁵ Yet again, we see a disavowal of the personal as an appropriate means for formulating the social and the political.

This reverence for life that obliges the fortunate to ease the passage of the doomed through life, an impersonal, universal, objective recognition of a shared, observable materiality, transcends any cultural, historical or even species boundaries, as there are:

scores of polymodal nociceptor sites just like ours in the head and neck of rainbow trout . . . This is the growing complication of the modern condition, the expanding circle of moral sympathy. Not only distant peoples are our brothers and sisters, but foxes too, and laboratory mice, and now the fish.⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., 278.

⁴⁸² Ibid., 272.

⁴⁸³ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid., 276.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., 187.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., 127.

At this point Perowne's reverence for life hits its limit as it encounters the pragmatic limitations of an ethics based in materiality. To accept that possessing the same polymodal nociceptor sites, means pain will be experienced in the same way in any living body, and to base one's universalism in such sites is to accept a moral obligation to the animals we eat to survive. Thus Perowne, standing in a fishmongers purchasing that night's dinner, pulls a Darwinian sleight-of-hand;

The trick, as always, the key to human success and domination, is to be selective in your mercies. For all the discerning talk, it's the close at hand, the visible that exerts the overpowering force. And what you don't see . . . That's why in gentle Marylebone the world seems to be entirely at peace.⁴⁸⁷

Human success relies on a selective understanding of the universal, one that makes use of the immediate surroundings. While Perowne's awareness of shared neuronal matter means he turns away from the still-living crabs and lobsters to the 'bloodless white flesh', there is an element of chagrin to his tone as he ponders the growing list of those to whom we have a moral obligation. It is no wonder, then, that he finds consolation in the logic of natural selection. Reverence for life, it seems, is limited by evolutionary protocol. Such a recognition undermines the ethical potential of Perowne's approach, particularly in his contemporary context, for it suggests that even recognising a shared physicality is not enough to secure the ethical relation when those who pull the epistemic strings are able to decide where the evolutionary lines are drawn. The turn to the genetic still leaves the dominant forces in the world able to inscribe meaning and value on the lives of others.

Portraying this preparedness to adapt apparently unquestionable truths and universal values supposedly grounded in them, McEwan begins to excoriate the apparently smooth surface of Perowne's reductionist ethics. The consolation that self-interest is part of humanity's evolutionary success does not fit easily with Perowne's reliance on the same values to establish our moral obligation to one another. The malleability of Perowne's genetic ethics suggests the empirical ground he seeks to rest them on is not as stable as he "knows" it to be. As Catherine Malabou, among others, notes, there is an innate connection between the modelling of the brain and the historical context in which a model is produced, as they are inflected with terms specific to the technological and social organisations of that moment. Malabou tells us:

It is because in each individual the brain constitutes the controlling authority par excellence that all the descriptions we can give of it always participate, in one way or another, in political analysis. We can thus affirm that there is no scientific study of the modalities of cerebral power that does not by the same token – implicitly and usually

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

unconsciously – adopt a stance with respect to the contemporary power of the very study within which it operates.⁴⁸⁸

Perowne has no doubt that if the correct institutions remain in place, science will produce a final, incontrovertible truth about human consciousness, which will subsequently provide the bedrock for a universal morality. What Perowne fails to acknowledge is that in extrapolating such codes from empirical evidence, one is necessarily entering into a process of ‘reading’ and ‘interpretation,’ in which material “truth” is translated into a broader lesson. In other words, because the brain is presumed to be the body’s master, the empirical evidence about the brain will always be read in terms provided by the conceptual framework that supports contemporary notions of governance and power in such a way that the apparent coincidence between the biological and cultural will reify society’s current form. Thus to draw upon the conclusions of neuroscience and genetics for moral and ethical mores is to risk simply solidifying the status quo, propping up the very institutions that produced the evidence. This is made manifest as Perowne’s career in neuroscience secures a comfortable and prosperous life for his family at the top of the social chain, while simultaneously providing an ethical approach that justifies such prosperity in a world of increasingly stark contrasts. Genetic reductionism not only demands Perowne console others, it simultaneously consoles.

Consolation is an intriguing figuring of responsibility. To quote the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), consolation is a specific form of care, the ‘comfort received by someone after a loss or disappointment.’⁴⁸⁹ In Perowne’s reading, consolation enters into evolutionary thinking from its very beginnings, as Darwin decides to ‘soften the message’ of *On The Origin of Species* by including a Creator in later editions, but nonetheless only offering ‘a bracing kind of consolation in the brief privilege of consciousness.’⁴⁹⁰ For Perowne, Darwin realises that his discoveries bring both wonder and loss into the world; as we lose the transcendental creator who bestowed meaning on our lives, we gain wonder at the ‘endless and beautiful forms of life’ that the brutalities of life have produced. Perowne thus shares Irigaray’s sense that the removal of the transcendental Other leaves us in a state of immanence, without a means of differentiating ourselves from the material world. We are left to wonder at how the material world can produce our subjectivity. Yet rather than using this wonder to cultivate a sensible transcendental relation, in which we embrace our immanence and develop an embodied culture, Perowne substitutes wonder for the transcendental Other by equating it with that

⁴⁸⁸ Catherine Malabou, *What Should We Do with Our Brain?*, trans. Sebastian Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 32.

⁴⁸⁹ Judy Pearsall, ed., *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, vol. 10th (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁴⁹⁰ McEwan, *Saturday*, 56.

which emerges as science dissects and explains the world. Wonder is an expression of science's continued doubt and surprise at the material's capacity to shape us, rather than recognition of our immanence. This means Perowne's turn to the body does not cultivate a sensible transcendental, but instead reduces the other to terms established by scientific investigation. Hence, to be humane is to help ease the pain of those whose suffering, be it physical or social, science reads as being inscribed in their very bones. But if Perowne too is seeking consolation, what is it that he has lost? Indeed, if we accept Head's argument that '*Saturday* represents a significant risk for McEwan in that it opts for consolation in the face of contemporary uncertainty,'⁴⁹¹ what exactly is the loss McEwan suggests we have suffered at this particular historical moment?

Violence, Loss, and Masculinity

Perowne's two violent encounters with Baxter shake his scientific assurance, for while he begins the novel by stating 'there is grandeur in this view of life', by the close of the day, all he can offer is the somewhat impotent recognition that at best, all that can be offered to the unfortunate is to minimise their miseries 'Somehow! He's no social theorist . . .'⁴⁹² Indeed, this shift is carried in Perowne's very physicality, as the pre-dawn Perowne who opens the novel provides a sharp contrast to the pre-dawn Perowne that closes it. Early on Saturday morning, a naked Perowne finds himself getting out of bed:

[M]ovement is easy, and pleasurable in his limbs, and his back and legs feel unusually strong. He stands there, naked by the bed – he always sleeps naked – feeling his full height, aware of his wife's patient breathing and of the wintry bedroom air on his skin. That too is a pleasurable sensation . . . he's alert and empty-headed and inexplicably elated.⁴⁹³

Yet by the end of the novel, this same man 'draws his dressing gown more closely around him', 'has to put his hand on the sill to steady himself'⁴⁹⁴ and 'feels skinny and frail in his dressing gown'⁴⁹⁵ in the pre-dawn hours. This latter state, brought on by his encounters with Baxter, is the one in which Perowne seeks consolation as much for himself as for others. Perowne has lost something in the unfolding of his *Saturday*, lost something as violence enters his life and his home, and as a result is left with a heightened awareness of his physical vulnerability.

In her analysis of the post- September 11th climate, Judith Butler brings together the concepts of loss, violence and vulnerability to demonstrate how the representations of these

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., 196.

⁴⁹² Ibid., 272.

⁴⁹³ Ibid., 3.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., 272.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., 275.

elements within a society work to produce a particular kind of normative subject, be it an individual subject or subject-as-nation-state. For Butler, representations of loss have the potential to make a 'tenuous "we" of us all,'⁴⁹⁶ not simply by virtue of a generalised sympathy based on the fact that 'all of us have some notion of what it is to have lost somebody,' but rather that the experience of loss contains within it a reminder of the fundamental vulnerability of the human condition. To lose somebody is to face the unavoidable fragility and mortality inherent in the living body, and in doing so, to gain a sense, if not a full awareness, of the absolute sociability of the body. As Butler puts it:

The body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others, but also to touch, and to violence, and bodies put us at risk of becoming the agency and instrument of all these as well. Although we struggle for rights over our own bodies, the very bodies for which we struggle are not quite ever only our own. The body has its invariably public dimension.⁴⁹⁷

For Butler, this public dimension begins at birth, as the absolute dependency of the infant on others for its survival means that our bodies are always already 'given over' to 'the world of others,' even if this 'giving over' is into a hostile world. To not be given over is to not survive.⁴⁹⁸ For Butler, the physicality of the body means we are always already social and are constituted by the world around us. Loss of another, grief, becomes an experience that 'contains the possibility of apprehending a mode of dispossession that is fundamental to who I am,'⁴⁹⁹ a mode in which we recognise that our physicality means that we never fully coincide just with ourselves, that our material vulnerability means 'we are social; we are comported toward a "you"; we are outside ourselves, constituted in cultural norms that precede and exceed us, given over to a set of cultural norms and a field of power that condition us fundamentally.'⁵⁰⁰ Grief is a moment in which our innate physical vulnerability can be understood, a sensation that opens up the possibility of apprehending how our embodied vulnerability shapes us as social beings.

Despite both turning to our materiality and exploring its fragility to articulate what it is to be human, Butler and Perowne produce radically different conclusions. For Perowne, the fact of our physical existence means we become expressions of our genetic inheritance, with the genotype becoming 'the modern variant of a soul.'⁵⁰¹ For Butler, our physical presence is that which determines that we are socially-constituted, producing a subject who is neither

⁴⁹⁶ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), 20.

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁵⁰¹ McEwan, *Saturday*, 279.

entirely autonomous, nor entirely at the mercy of the world around them. The crucial difference between these two readings of the material subject is the location of the body as a whole. In her discussion, Butler not only explicitly posits that the skin and the flesh become the media through which we enter the social, she argues that the vulnerability of the whole body is what produces our social bond and subjectivity. Moreover, the specificity of this fleshly body will influence how those constitutive social bonds are formed, as normative notions come up against specific morphologies.⁵⁰² While Butler places the body in its entirety at the nexus of the social and the individual, Perowne moves past the surface of the body into the microscopic, extracting an ethics and concept of subjectivity from neuronal activity and connectivity, the interactions of amino acids and enzymes at a molecular level, and translating the evolutionary logic inscribed in the genome's code into a history and social theory for humanity. Perowne's embodied subjectivity is one that, in Irigaray's terms, uses the body 'in a manner irrelevant to the economy of our flesh,'⁵⁰³ replicating culture's severance of symbolic and material as it overwrites the lived experience of the body with a metaphysics of dissection and atomisation. Embodiment and its consequences are skipped over in favour of an abstract materialism, one that requires technology and specialism to be experienced. The body in Perowne's conceptualisation becomes a container for the wonder that is the wet stuff of consciousness, a container whose functions are controlled by that wonder and whose presence requires the illusion of instantaneous present. In his turn to the foundational elements of materiality, Perowne unwittingly rearticulates established conceptual norms that underpin some of the very supernatural, religious and irrational thinking that his empiricism aims to discredit. To move through the surface of the flesh and into the minutia of matter, and to isolate the brain as a master organ even as one embraces its material nature is to simultaneously apply the methods of a phallically-informed science to the body and to reinstall the conceptualisation of the body, of matter, as a 'home'; the body 'houses' the brain, which in turn 'contains' the secret of consciousness, just as our genes 'contain' the code of life.

It is here that we find the crucial difference between the scientifically-informed materialism encapsulated in Perowne's thought and the turn to the body for ethical and ontological understanding in the work of people like Butler and Irigaray. Placing the logic used by Perowne in a broader historical and philosophical context not only demonstrates that Perowne's modelling of the brain continues in a tradition of political and technological reification, but also illustrates precisely how invested such methodologies and conceptual frameworks are in a particular symbolic, a symbolic that in its current formation is designed to

⁵⁰² Butler, *Precarious*, 32–33.

⁵⁰³ Irigaray, *Conversations*, 113.

'house' the ideal phallic subject. This turn to body for confirmation of the phallic ideal may seem contradictory, particularly as Irigaray tells us that it is the transcendental that is simultaneously the goal and the source of that ideal. Yet Perowne's substitution of scientifically-inspired wonder for God allows him to maintain his sense of the transcendental. He gazes down at society's unfortunates from his bedroom window,⁵⁰⁴ while his work at the hospital leads him to 'experience a super-human capacity,'⁵⁰⁵ to come 'down from the operating room like a god, an angel with the glad tidings – life, not death.'⁵⁰⁶ The discoveries of neuroscience not only give Perowne a privileged insight in the behaviours of those around him, as well as providing him with a material wealth that places him physically and socially 'above' the less fortunate, the wonder that results from his understanding of the essential materiality of human nature gives him access to a god-like transcendental position. What's more, it's a position that his son, his male progeny, seems destined to inherit, as we are told his musical talent means he 'might even one day walk with the gods, the British gods . . . Someone has written somewhere that Theo Perowne plays like an angel.'⁵⁰⁷ It seems that the genetically-determined subject still has access to the heights of the transcendental, despite turning away from God.

Immediately after claiming that our materiality demands an ethics of consolation, Perowne has another vertiginous moment:

He feels himself turning on a giant wheel, like the Eye on the south bank of the Thames, just about to arrive at the highest point – he's poised on a hinge of perception, before the drop, and he can see ahead calmly. Or it's the eastward turn of the earth he imagines, delivering him towards the dawn at a stately one thousand miles an hour. If he counts on sleep rather than the clock to divide the days, then this is still his Saturday, dropping far below him, as deep as a lifetime. And from here, from the top of his day, he can see far ahead, before the descent begins.⁵⁰⁸

Perowne is carried out of the temporality of ticking clocks and rises, above his life, above the city even, into existence on a cosmic scale in which he is aware of the turn of the earth. From this apex, he can survey what is to come with a calm detachment. For an instant, the professional reductionist attains a god's eye view of existence. Yet from this transcendental position, what Perowne sees is a future dictated by the fragility of human flesh. The death of his mother and John Grammaticus; the arrival of Daisy and Gulio's child signifying an end of Perowne and Rosalind's parenthood; the giving up of sport and moving away from London as

⁵⁰⁴ McEwan, *Saturday*, 64–65.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 273.

they enter their fifties.⁵⁰⁹ The same knowledge that gives rise to wonder, then, also brings Perowne's thinking into a melancholic proximity to death. Moreover, listed alongside these private inevitabilities is a London which:

lies wide open, impossible to defend, waiting for its bomb, like a hundred other cities. Rush hour will be a convenient time. It might resemble the Paddington crash – twisted rails, buckled, upraised commuter coaches, stretchers handed out through broken windows, the hospital's Emergency Plan in action. Berlin, Paris, Lisbon. The authorities agree, an attack's inevitable. He lives in different times – because the newspapers say so doesn't mean it isn't true. But from the top of his day, this is a future that's harder to read, a horizon indistinct with possibilities.⁵¹⁰

It is in this instant that we see Perowne's materialism played out to its final consequences. On the one hand, the turn away from the transcendental to find a concrete foundation for the definition of the subject and a biological ethics permits Perowne to approach something like the ideal phallic subjectivity. To know matter as Perowne does is to find a rational, logical and evolutionary source for existence. Furthermore, to have Perowne's privileged access to matter allows him to know the subject in a manner that terrorism discourses can only strive for, as he is to be able to read individuals' destinies, to understand exactly what motivates behaviour, to offer consolation to the unfortunate, and ultimately, as Perowne realises after operating on Baxter, to mete out punishment: '[b]y saving his life in the operating theatre, Henry also committed Baxter to his torture. Revenge enough.'⁵¹¹ Rather than abolishing the transcendental with a return to the body, Perowne's 'faith' that the institutions of science will uncover the secret 'contained' within the body means that he is once more making use of the body to establish an ideal, disembodied subject. The microscopic becomes the sublime mirror to which man looks for a reflection of himself; the scientist, with his privileged knowledge and control over matter comes to occupy the very same space once reserved for God. The body is passed through and rendered invisible and silent once again.

Yet in the instant Perowne reaches this pinnacle of phallic thought, his vision is clouded by the spectre of violence. While his medical knowledge allows him to accurately foresee how the lives of his family and patients will develop, the possibility of another terrorist attack throws a shroud across the future, challenging any attempts at certainty. Previously, Perowne resisted media claims of 'different times,' seeing in his city instead a 'commercial wellbeing [that] is robust and will defend itself to the last,'⁵¹² and displacing the possibility his

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., 273–276.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., 276.

⁵¹¹ Ibid., 278.

⁵¹² Ibid., 126.

society may 'fail' into an unspecified but distant future.⁵¹³ Now, Perowne willingly accepts that he lives in different times, thanks to his own experience of violence and vulnerability. His initial encounter with Baxter leaves him questioning his behaviour, and with a heightened awareness of his bodily limits as he joins his colleague Strauss on the squash court:

Perowne suddenly feels his own life as fragile and precious. His limbs appear to him as neglected old friends, absurdly long and breakable. Is he in mild shock? His heart will be all the more vulnerable after that punch. His chest still aches. He has a duty to survive, and he mustn't endanger his own life for a mere game, smacking a ball against a wall.⁵¹⁴

Already, Perowne detects in his vulnerability his connection to others, albeit in terms of duty to them. It is not until Baxter brings violence into the Perowne household that Perowne comes to understand that material vulnerability is not simply a question of duty, but a stake in how we are constituted as individuals. The moment his family's fragile flesh is under threat, all Perowne's certainties disappear. As Baxter punches Grammaticus and leaves him nursing a broken nose, 'Perowne can't convince himself that molecules and faulty genes alone are terrorising his family . . . Perowne himself is responsible.'⁵¹⁵ In marked contrast to the rational diagnostic approach he adopts in his first run-in with Baxter, this time 'Henry's self-cancelling thoughts drift and turn, impossible to marshal.'⁵¹⁶ The vulnerability of his family unravels his sense of self, leaving him unable to act:

The proper thing would be to hit Baxter hard in the face with a clenched fist . . . But when Henry imagines himself about to act, and sees a ghostly warrior version of himself leap out of his body at Baxter, his heart rate accelerates so swiftly that he feels giddy, weak, unreliable.⁵¹⁷

When faced with the vulnerability of his family, Perowne's sense of being a distinct individual dissolves. The final blow comes as Perowne attempts to re-enact his previous victory, turning to scientific discourse and the promise of help to undo Baxter once again:

He's cut off abruptly by Theo. 'Stop it Dad! Stop talking. Fucking shut up or he'll do it'. And he's right. Baxter has pushed the blade flat against the side of Rosalind's neck. She sits upright on the sofa, hands clasping her knees, face empty of expression, her gaze still fixed ahead. Only a tremor in her shoulders shows her terror.⁵¹⁸

Baxter's violence in the novel thus serves not only to expose Perowne's own vulnerability, but to demonstrate the extent to which our connections to those around us constitute us and thus

⁵¹³ Ibid., 149.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid., 102.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid., 210.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid., 213.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid., 213.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid., 216.

leave us vulnerable in the very fact of their vulnerability. In the wake of their ordeal, the Perownes find reassurance in reaffirming their bodily presence: '[w]hat meets their needs is touch – they sit close, hold hands, embrace,' as they are 'delivered from private nightmare, and returned to the web of kindly social and familial relations, without which they're nothing.'⁵¹⁹ In the face of such material vulnerability, a symbolic that claims to have a controlling stake in the material world is undermined, as the body it claims to transcend and master becomes an irreducible presence.

The epistemological access to the violent Other that terrorism discourses attempts to replicate is hence not enough to secure the subject in the face of violence. Such a realisation inextricably involves a loss for Perowne. As violent action makes him feel his own physical vulnerability and how profoundly his sense of self rests on equally vulnerable others, the phallic ideal of the rational, discrete, transcendent individual becomes unobtainable. For Perowne, to be a man, in this city, at this time, is to have lost the certainty that relied on the repression of the reality of a vulnerable fleshly body. But rather than 'tarry' with the grief of such a loss like Butler, Perowne finds consolation in the very bodily existence that has asserted itself so traumatically, turning to the female body for comfort in his insecurity. As Perowne curls up against his sleeping wife in the novel's closing lines:

He fits himself around her, her silk pyjamas, her scent, her warmth, her beloved form, and draws closer to her. Blindly, he kisses her nape. There's always this, is one of his remaining thoughts. And then: there's only this.⁵²⁰

When confronted with vulnerability of our embodied nature, Perowne's scientifically-informed wonder is no longer enough to provide consolation, for it is constituted by the same space between knowing and seeing that gives rise to terror. Deprived of even this transcendental guarantor, Perowne finds consolation in the female body, fitting himself to her silent, somnolent form, a shaken phallic masculine finding its form once again in the quiet ground of the maternal-feminine.

McEwan shows Perowne's turn to neuroscience as failing to stabilise the boundary between wonder and terror, suggesting that Perowne's reductionist approach is not enough to secure a sense of identity in a world where terrorism and its representations permeate global politics and media. But by portraying the limitations and failings of Perowne's approach, McEwan simultaneously sets up an alternative means of drawing a distinction between terror and wonder, terrorist Other and legitimate self. He does so by turning to the mind, rather than simply the wet matter of the brain, a turn which leads McEwan to develop an understanding of

⁵¹⁹ Ibid., 228–229.

⁵²⁰ Ibid., 279.

language that allows him to disavow the common ground between rational, moral, Western masculinities and irrational, immoral, terrorist masculinity. By constructing the mind as constituted by both narrative and matter, McEwan imbues language a moral obligation to differentiate between “us” and the Other, as we shall now explore.

The Duty of Language

If in Perowne’s account the physical material of the body acts as counter-argument to any attempts to articulate a form of social construction,⁵²¹ Butler’s reading posits that the body’s vulnerability creates the need for representation to generate and mediate the social, and in turn, the social comes to delineate ‘human norms’ in the representations it offers. For Butler ‘there is a limit to discourse that establishes the limits of human intelligibility,’⁵²² but what remains beyond the realm of discourse is dehumanised. As such ‘the kinds of public grieving that are available to me make clear the norms by which the “human” is constituted for me’.⁵²³ What it is to be human is thus established by the limits of discourse and the narrative representation of the grievable life:

I am as much constituted by those I do grieve for as by those whose deaths I disavow, whose nameless and faceless deaths form the melancholic background for my social world, if not my First Worldism.⁵²⁴

For Butler, discourse defines what it is to be human by making some lives present, while leaving others unrecognised. Put alongside Blanchot’s reading of language, while language at least marks the absence of a living-flesh, those that remain beyond language are denied even the possibility of death and with it, the recognition that is mourning. For Butler, then, discourse, representation, narrative, are not merely human creations; they constitute our very identities by rendering certain forms of subjectivity present, and others profoundly absent.

Turning from Perowne’s material reductionism to the model of the mind that the text itself offers us, we discover *Saturday* is not simply the literary “equivalent” of a CT scan. The text does not strain to replicate the scan’s ability to map activity and locate responses in particular neuronal clusters. Rather, McEwan gives us ‘the mind’ as language. To argue, as Head does, that the novel attempts to ‘engage’ with human consciousness is to ignore the unchallenged acceptance of the appropriateness of language for portraying this consciousness. At no point does McEwan draw into question the appropriateness of narrative as a means to

⁵²¹ For instance, Perowne’s repost to the Foucauldian critique of madness Daisy has been taught is to take her to a closed psychiatric wing, disputing the theory with the authority of the physical. *Ibid.*, 92.

⁵²² Butler, *Precarious*, 35.

⁵²³ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.*

represent the mind and, in fact, even asserts the aptness of the form for representing the mind by frequently undermining Perowne's dismissal of narrative as a key to understanding humanity. As Perowne claims '[t]his notion of Daisy's, that people can't 'live' without stories, is simply not true. He is living proof,' he is rendered ridiculous twice over, as he eagerly seeks for news of the plane – or 'his own story' – in the newspaper an instant later, but more profoundly by the fact that he is oblivious to his own existence as a fictional character.⁵²⁵ Perowne only exists because of a story. He is living proof of the absolute necessity of the narrative for the subject. Similarly, we know that it is not just seeing Professor Taleb's torture scars, but having 'listened to his stories'⁵²⁶ that leaves Perowne ambivalent about the pending invasion and the West's assertive role in global politics. Above all, Perowne's observations of Lily's decline demonstrates how profoundly language and narrative are entwined with identity and human existence. As long as Lily has a sense of grammar, she has a sense of herself. Not only this, but as Salisbury observes in her reading of McEwan's portrayal of the fragility of the brain:

[F]or McEwan, narrative, in bearing witness to life, tells a different kind of truth . . . fiction-making . . . becomes a form of kindness, something that affirms the reality of human bonds against the authentically sublime indifference of cerebral matter and a material finitude in which personality and memory are finally swallowed up.⁵²⁷

The damaged brain, be it wounded or diseased, is a reminder that our very materiality carries with it the 'capacity for subjective identity to be utterly reconfigured at any moment, to be forced to make its neuronal connections anew.'⁵²⁸ In the face of such incredible and potentially catastrophic vulnerability, narrative becomes crucial, for 'although the brain wound denudes the subject of his or her narratives of connection and self-legibility, these can be preserved and contained in the minds and representations of those who do remember, or can empathically imagine and join themselves to, the complexity of who the person once was.'⁵²⁹ Lily's fraying neuronal networks may be taking away her access to language, and with it any 'notion of a continuous, autobiographical subject with an individual narrative of itself,'⁵³⁰ but narrative works against the vulnerability of matter by ensuring that something of the subject's narrative is retained in those who remember, or at least hear the story. Lily's ability to narrate herself may have slipped beyond legibility, but Perowne can still communicate to the reader something of who she was as his own narrative in turn captures something of hers.

⁵²⁵ McEwan, *Saturday*, 69.

⁵²⁶ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁵²⁷ Salisbury, 'Narration', 903.

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*, 900.

⁵²⁹ *Ibid.*, 904.

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*, 900.

Narrative, then, is more than just a means of representing the mind; it constitutes the mind and communicates our subjectivity to others, in such a way as to inscribe ourselves in the minds of others as they have in ours. Much as Butler has argued, in *Saturday* 'the shaping and sharing of narratives becomes part of what it means to be human at all.'⁵³¹ This creates an interesting tension between the explicit content of Perowne's thought and the shape his thoughts take. Groes argues that this tension serves to make 'clear to the reader that Perowne's experience is at the mercy of the narrator's locutions, which constantly deride him by pointing out the limits of his frame of reference.'⁵³² Not only do the derisory moments emphasize the power of the narrator, in Groes' view this apparent 'disparagement foregrounds the role of the reader, who is forced to collude with the curious voice . . . narrating Perowne's consciousness from the inside while incessantly offering a commentary upon him.'⁵³³ While Groes reads this collusion and narrative contradiction as a 'loss of narrational authority' on Perowne's part, that prevents 'any comfortable or simple reading of the novel, while capturing the post-9/11 climate of anxiety,'⁵³⁴ it also has the effect of situating Perowne between the narrator and the reader, while at the same time, differentiating Perowne from the narrative. Just as the *The Good Terrorist's* commentaries on Alice complicate the assumption that a subject always knows their own mind, so *Saturday's* narrative voice leaves Perowne's ideas problematic in order to reveal something that escapes him. Perowne's loss of narrative authority unveils narrative as that which simultaneously connects us and shapes us, but against which it is possible to stake a degree of autonomy. Perowne exists in the narrative exchange between the narrator and the reader, yet does not coincide precisely with the form of the narrative that shapes him. In Butler's description of the inherent connectedness of human subjectivity, such moments become the markers of autonomy, an autonomy that is paradoxically made apparent precisely because of the relationships that constitute it. In stressing the significance of narrative in the construction of subjectivity, McEwan is substituting one form of autonomy for another. Instead of the phallic understanding of autonomy, in which the autonomous subject achieves singularity, authority, completeness, we see an autonomy articulated in terms that recognise that we are always given over to the other.

If narrative is central to the constitution of the subject, we are all in effect put at risk by literature's capacity to appropriate language for its own purposes. Moreover, if words have the monstrous ability to mean more than what we intend, it becomes impossible to secure a

⁵³¹ Ibid., 905.

⁵³² Groes, 'Modernist Consciousness', 104.

⁵³³ Ibid.

⁵³⁴ Ibid.

dividing line between ourselves and the terrorist Other. It is precisely to resist what Blanchot identifies as the terroristic possibilities of literature that *Saturday* enacts a rethinking of language through this tension between Perowne and the narrator. Early in his day, Perowne questions the impulse of the literary genius towards fiction, as 'it interests him less to have the world reinvented; he wants it explained. The times are strange enough. Why make things up?'⁵³⁵ The irony of a fictional creation questioning the value of fiction is clear, yet this is not simply another instance of McEwan undermining Perowne's argument, as Perowne swiftly turns the tables by ridiculing McEwan himself. Having decided the 'workmanlike' novels *Madame Bovary* and *Anna Karenina* 'had the virtue, at least, of representing a recognisable physical reality,' Perowne turns his critical eye on 'the so-called magical realists':

What were these authors of reputation doing – grown men and women of the twentieth century – granting supernatural powers to their characters? He never made it all the way through a single one of those irksome confections. And written for adults, not children. In more than one, heroes and heroines were born with or sprouted wings . . . Others were granted a magical sense of smell, or tumbled unharmed out of high-flying aircraft. One visionary saw through a pub window his parents as they had been some weeks after his conception, discussing the possibility of aborting him.⁵³⁶

In this scathing summary of the works by stars of the British literary canon Angela Carter and Salman Rushdie, McEwan's *The Child in Time* is the last text in Perowne's irksome bibliography. Head reads this 'self-referential play' as 'an implicit complaint about the way in which *The Child in Time* is sometimes wrongly categorised,' as magical realism, for unlike the other texts implicated by Perowne's list, McEwan's novel makes 'references to theoretical physics, giving it the kind of quasi-plausibility that is never attempted in magic realism proper.'⁵³⁷ This may indeed be the case, but for all its attempts to ground itself in scientific discourses, according to Perowne, McEwan's previous work is nevertheless guilty of the same child-like lack of realism. One could read this tension between author and protagonist as the latest in McEwan's 'fictive relationships that dramatise the differences between literature and science,'⁵³⁸ such as Joe Rose and Clarissa Mellon in *Enduring Love*. But if the novel sets out to explore what it is to be a man in this cultural moment, what does McEwan's self-reflexive critique mean? Further, why is it that Perowne's bad bibliography is made up of British authors?

As Perowne's literary criticism continues, the boundary between Perowne's thought and McEwan's writing collapses momentarily, as Perowne becomes 'a man':

A man who attempts to ease the miseries of failing minds by repairing brains is bound to respect the material world, its limits, and what it can sustain – consciousness, no

⁵³⁵ McEwan, *Saturday*, 66.

⁵³⁶ Ibid., 67.

⁵³⁷ Head, *McEwan*, 188.

⁵³⁸ Amigoni, 'Luxury of Storytelling', 152.

less. It isn't an article of faith with him, he knows it for a quotidian fact, the mind is what the brain, mere matter, performs. If that's worthy of awe, it also deserves curiosity; the actual, not the magical, should be the challenge.⁵³⁹

Whereas once the transcendental Other allowed language to maintain its umbilical tie to the world, now wonder at the brain's ability to generate consciousness has taken its place. This substitution makes a particular demand of language, insisting that its representations simultaneously respect the constraints of the material world and convey the wonder inscribed in matter and unveiled by science. To simply remain in the realm of the possible, as the detailed descriptions of the realist canon do, may be 'convincing enough, but surely not so very difficult to marshal if you were halfway observant and had the patience to write them all down.'⁵⁴⁰ In place of uninspired observation, the demand here is for an acceptance of the actual that recognises the wonder of that actual, and is thus inspired to explore and explain what it is to exist in the material world. Perowne's profession has taught him that there is magic enough in matter, and this for him becomes the proper material for fiction. Indeed, literary fiction has a duty to the material world;

This reading list persuaded Perowne that the supernatural was the recourse of an insufficient imagination, a dereliction of duty, a childish evasion of the difficulties and wonders of the real, of the demanding re-enactment of the plausible.⁵⁴¹

In abandoning the material world, modern fiction, or postmodern fiction as exemplified by magical realism, does nothing to further the understanding of what it is to be human for Perowne: 'fiction is too humanly flawed, too sprawling and hit-and-miss to inspire uncomplicated wonder at the magnificence of human ingenuity, of the impossible dazzlingly achieved.'⁵⁴² For the man who has encountered the awe-inspiring mere matter of the brain, literary fiction's lack of curiosity about the material world means it has failed to achieve what scientific discourses, along with other artistic disciplines, have: to instil a sense of wonder at the material world in the audience, whilst at the same time being an awe-inspiring example of what 'mere matter' is capable of producing, '[w]ork that you cannot begin to imagine achieving yourself, that displays a ruthless, nearly inhuman element of self-enclosed perfection – this is his idea of genius.'⁵⁴³

If literary fiction has a duty to material reality and, at the same time, a duty to exemplify what the brain is capable of producing, is McEwan thus not attempting to produce a novel that fulfils his protagonist's demands? Perowne's literary criticism forms the parameters

⁵³⁹ McEwan, *Saturday*, 67.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., 67–68.

⁵⁴² Ibid., 68.

⁵⁴³ Ibid.

for McEwan's text, just as McEwan's narrative creates Perowne. McEwan is attempting to represent the experience of consciousness for a specific man, over a set period of time, in a very specific socio-historical context. Childs observes *Saturday* is unusual in McEwan's oeuvre, as his first novel to be set entirely in an identifiable contemporary moment. The text's engagement with identifiable "reality" extends to the geographical specificity of the novel; it is not hard to trace Perowne's movement across a map of London, while McEwan has let it be known that the Fitzrovia house the Perownes live in is based on his own.⁵⁴⁴ Even that the fish stew Perowne prepares follows McEwan's own recipe.⁵⁴⁵ These 'personal' touches are only revealed outside of the novel, but the fact McEwan is keen to make these connections public demonstrates a desire to ensure his novel is recognised as being grounded in the real world. Within the text itself, it is the language of neuroscience that most strenuously tries to connect fiction to the physical reality of the body, continually underscoring the plausibility of Perowne as a character and anchoring the text in the contemporary understanding of the brain. But if the scientific rhetoric attempts to tie the literary text to solid ground, the intense intertextuality of *Saturday* also serves as a form of literary anchor. To borrow Groes's comprehensive list, the novel either cites, makes reference to or echoes at least the following, as well as others not mentioned here: Sophocles, Thomas Wyatt, Shakespeare, Milton, William Blake, Mary Shelley, Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, Dickens, Darwin, Tolstoy, George Eliot, Robert Browning, Matthew Arnold, Gustave Flaubert, Joseph Conrad, Franz Kafka, Henry James, Saul Bellow, Philip Larkin, James Fenton, Ted Hughes, Craig Raine, Andrew Motion, Wagner, Beethoven, Schubert, Bach, Eric Clapton, Marsalis, Ry Cooder, Coltrane, Johnny Lee Hooker, Mondrian, Cezanne, Howard Hodgkin, Cornelia Parker, Fred Halliday, and Paul Elkman.⁵⁴⁶ Such prolific referencing suggests that McEwan is even more anxious than Gordimer to explicitly hook his novel into the cultural and social reality in which it was formed. Just as Perowne reads the subject as being an expression of a genome, so too McEwan makes plain that this novel is the expression of a whole host of specific influences, breaking down the artifice of the sublimely-inspired work and instead laying bare its heritage, its evolution from the narratives that make up our world. Moreover, this suggests McEwan sees *Saturday* as a text very much constituted by its specific position in a particular historical moment.

⁵⁴⁴ Mick Brown, 'Ian McEwan Interview: Warming to the Topic of Climate Change', *The Telegraph* (London, March 11, 2010), <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/7412584/Ian-McEwan-interview-warming-to-the-topic-of-climate-change.html>.

⁵⁴⁵ For the fish stew recipe, see McEwan's official website, <http://www.ianmcewan.com/bib/articles/fishstew.html>.

⁵⁴⁶ Groes, 'Modernist Consciousness', 102.

Arguably, McEwan and Perowne are of one mind when it comes to the relationship literature should have to reality. McEwan attempts to create a seamless connection between the text and the world, pinning down the potential frivolity of literature with the reality-claims of science and the weight of social, historical, and cultural reference. In light of this, the critique of *The Child in Time* becomes an assertion that there is a different ethic at work in *Saturday*, one in which literature has a duty to the material world and, as such, should be shaped by the possibilities and wonders science makes apparent, rather than freedom to interpret scientific discovery for its own ends. For Head, *Saturday* articulates a reconfiguring of the relationship between literature and science that firmly establishes science as the proper arbiter of ethical understanding, for if 'the precious gift of consciousness' becomes the 'impulse behind the ethical imperative', this imperative is 'partly generated by wonder at the biological marvel that science has revealed. In the absence of any other moral system, cognition of the science of the mind, as well as that branch of science itself, becomes, in an ethical sense, the superior form of imagination.'⁵⁴⁷ Arguably it is not just the access to the workings of the mind available to neuroscience that grants science its privileged position within the text. We have two models of the mind present in the text, Perowne's materialist reductionist description, and the narrative model performed by the text itself. In narrating the consciousness of a material reductionist, McEwan effectively collapses the possibility of distinguishing between the biologically-determined and socially-constructed. The mind in this model cannot be adequately described by either model and thus becomes a matter of 'at least' both. The mind is undeniably the 'mere wet stuff' of the brain, but as suggested by Butler, the very fact of this 'stuff' ensures that the mind is also inherently social, and as such is necessarily shaped by the narratives that mediate this fundamental sociability. The mind is matter and language, neurons and narrative, genetics and expression; the mind is where the material world and language meet in such a manner as to make it impossible to discern a division between the two. Arguably, it is in this radical coming together of language and matter in the make-up of the mind that *Saturday* locates the moral authority of scientific discourse. As the discourse that places the biggest premium on language's purchase on the material, science becomes that which replicates most faithfully the model of the mind McEwan produces. The mind becomes the guarantor of the connection between language and matter, and thus it is the discourse that respects this connection, albeit in the form of the assumptions that structure its usage, that gains authority in an ethical system that takes the mind as its cornerstone.

⁵⁴⁷ Head, *McEwan*, 192.

The intertwining of language and matter in McEwan's figuring of the mind turns the 'wet stuff' of the brain into the ground upon which the symbolic rests. In McEwan's formulation, the realisation that narratives are pivotal in the formation of consciousness places language under a specific obligation, unlike other forms of representation, for as Wall notes, while Perowne 'admires the abstract purity of non-representational painting and Bach and the blues,' he demands something else from literature:

He wants it to be referential, but holds it to an absurd kind of 'honesty' to actual events. His critique of the novel pays no attention to the medium of language, yet he often finds himself wishing for better language to articulate his experience . . . he tends to see literature as almost simplistically referential . . .⁵⁴⁸

Wall attributes this apparently contradictory application of aesthetic values and desires to the fact that literature's 'medium is language, not paint or notes – the same medium that constitutes our social lives.'⁵⁴⁹ The figuring of consciousness in *Saturday* suggests that literature is an art form whose primary material is also a foundational component of consciousness and thus literature cannot be allowed the same freedom to play with the relationship between material and reality permitted to other art forms. In short, because narrative, and by extension, language, is central in structuring our subjectivity and society, it becomes irresponsible to draw the relation between reality and language into question. In this context, the irresponsible use of language becomes more than a matter of aesthetics. As the Perownes are confronted by Baxter in their own home, McEwan suggests it becomes a matter of life and death.

This comes to the fore when Baxter threatens Perowne's pregnant daughter with rape. Upon forcing her to undress and thereby unveiling her secret pregnancy, Baxter demands that she reads from her poetry collection, 'your dirtiest one. Something really filthy.'⁵⁵⁰ We already know that her collection, *My Saucy Bark*, has made her father uncomfortable with its frank representation of his daughter's sexuality. Faced with reading such a poem to her would-be rapist, Daisy panics. A gentle prompt from her grandfather leads Daisy to recite Matthew Arnold's 'Dover Beach' instead, all the while pretending it is her own work, a pretence that

⁵⁴⁸ Kathleen Wall, 'Ethics, Knowledge, and the Need for Beauty: Zadie Smith's "On Beauty" and Ian McEwan's "Saturday"', *University of Toronto Quarterly* 77, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 781. This is a slightly contentious point, as the 'non-representational' paintings the Perownes have in their living room are by Bridget Riley and Howard Hodgkin, both artists who contest the classification of their work as 'abstract', as both read their work as representing the emotional state rather than the figurative. Similarly, one cannot assume music is non-representational by virtue of the fact it is sound, the blues being a particularly good illustration of the problems with such a claim, as its lyrical and musical conventions very clearly locate it within a particular historical and cultural tradition.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid., 780.

⁵⁵⁰ McEwan, *Saturday*, 220.

fools both Baxter and Perowne himself. Having read her work before, Perowne finds '[t]he lines surprise him – clearly he hasn't been reading closely enough . . . he feels himself slipping through the words into the things they describe.'⁵⁵¹ Arnold's words, 'unusually meditative, mellifluous and wilfully archaic' to Perowne's ear, have a dramatic impact on Baxter, much to Perowne's disbelief: '[c]ould it happen, is it within the bounds of the real, that a mere poem of Daisy's could precipitate a mood swing?'⁵⁵² Poetry, it seems, challenges even the authority of the genetic code. Again, in a moment that collapses the distance between author and protagonist, the reader is asked almost directly if such a thing is possible, how far we should trust the reality claims of a novel that includes such a moment of transformation, for it is more than a mood swing Baxter undergoes. On hearing the poem a second time, all thoughts of violence dissipate from Baxter's mind. The fact that 'Dover Beach' reminds Baxter of where he grew up is enough to induce 'the transformation of his role, from lord of terror to amazed admirer.'⁵⁵³ Whereas Perowne's attempts to mollify Baxter with scientific rhetoric have failed, Arnold's poem has utterly transformed his intentions, undone his resolve and opened him up to the possibility of participating in Perowne's fictional drug trials. Indeed, Baxter decides he only wants Daisy's collection as the spoils of his break-in.

Poetic language, in its potential to mean many things, has the power to undo and remake us, much like Butler's argument about our relation to other and loss. We are made and unmade by the other, and narrative, language, as the tool that facilitates our communication with the other, carries within it the seeds of our unmaking and transformation. The manner in which we use language thus has a direct link to how we manage our material relations: the incorrect use of language leads directly to physical violence. Hence it becomes imperative that literature's revolutionary appropriation of the world is contained. It is words that let one 'slip through into the things they describe' that are of value, that permit the kind of transformation Baxter undergoes, words that make beautiful but uncomplicated claim to the territory they represent. Arnold's poetic language provokes vivid scenes in Perowne's mind; the first reading sees Daisy standing with her lover on a terrace, looking out to sea at sunset, while the second sees Baxter at a window, contemplating the sea and the bleak fate that awaits him and armies further afield. Arnold's language thus eschews the kind of transparent relation to the world assumed by discourses such as science, for the language is loose enough that in each reading, Perowne envisions a different collection of elements, albeit in a similar setting. What does remain the same however, is that which the language lets one slip through into: in each case,

⁵⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵⁵² Ibid., 221.

⁵⁵³ Ibid., 223.

Perowne feels what it is to be someone else in this moment. Perowne's narrated thoughts merge with his perception of Daisy as she reads 'Dover Beach' the first time, as Perowne's train of thought reflects his understanding of hers: '[s]he thinks there was another time, even further back, when the earth was new, and the sea was consoling, and nothing came between man and God.'⁵⁵⁴ On the second reading, Perowne realises 'it's through Baxter's ears that he hears' Arnold's description of the sea's melancholy. The crucial connection the poem makes is thus not based in the ability of individual words to accurately describe a particular object, not in the stabilising of the relationship between language and what it claims to represent, but in the manner in which poetic language allows one to slip into the experience of another. Although we are not told directly how Baxter 'hears' the poem, his astonishment that Daisy has written it seems to be precisely that which distracts him from his violent intent towards her. She becomes real to him in a manner that she was not before; she is no longer 'Little Miss Nothing.'⁵⁵⁵ Although even her pregnancy did not serve as powerful enough indicator of her materiality and vulnerability to deter Baxter, the poem's ability to let one slip into the mind of the other acts as guarantor of Daisy's safety.

Salisbury tells us that Lily's loss of identity is counteracted by the preservation of her identity in the memories and narratives of her son, as Perowne's narrative of his mother becomes all that preserves her identity beyond her physical deterioration. Baxter, on the other hand, is undone by language, made aware of the other in such a way that his violent bent is defused as he develops an attachment, awareness, admiration for the other. Narrative language thus becomes both that which preserves our identity beyond the limits of our own material vulnerability, and a means through which we can find ourselves undone and transformed by the other. It is this power to preserve and undo the subject that means literary language has an obligation to communicate something of reality, to anchor itself in the confines of world and narrate that world. To permit literature the Blanchotian freedom of appropriating for itself the negation of the world in order to make everything available to it is to make ourselves as vulnerable in language as we are in our flesh. Suddenly, everything that makes up our subjectivity is put at risk, not just our physical existence. More than this, poetry's diversion of Baxter from his violent purpose opens up the possibility that the opposite movement is equally likely; that the failure to communicate something of the reality of one's subjectivity in one's language puts oneself at physical risk. In this context, Perowne's prognosis of contemporary literature as suffering from 'insufficient imagination, a dereliction of duty' takes on much greater significance. In turning away from literature that engages with and

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid., 221.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid., 214.

remains within the limits of the “real”, contemporary literature enacts Blanchot’s negation, and in doing so, erases the possibility of the subject. This not only produces works that fail to embody the wonder that is the human brain in the texture of their text, but also means such novels fail to communicate anything of ‘what it means to be a man. In a city. In a century. In transition.’ As Daisy’s encounter with Baxter suggests, such a failure to communicate becomes dangerous. While many critics have emphasized the power of Arnold’s words in bringing about the transformation in Baxter, this is to underplay the significance of Baxter’s assumption that the words come from Daisy herself. His repetition of the refrain ‘You wrote that. You *wrote* that,’⁵⁵⁶ indicates that the fact the words are presumed to emanate from Daisy is just as significant in Baxter’s change of heart as the poem itself. Baxter assumes the words communicate something of Daisy; her naked presence acts as a guarantor of the poem’s message. The poem’s ability to communicate something of the wonder of the other protects Daisy’s vulnerable flesh. Any suggestion of disconnection between the words and the speaker would once again put Daisy at risk. How we read Daisy’s inability to read her own words in this context is thus potentially significant, as we shall see.

It is perhaps no coincidence then that Perowne’s condemnation of modern literature echoes McEwan’s own claim that it was ‘a failure of the imagination’ that permitted the perpetrators of the September 11th attacks to carry out their crimes.⁵⁵⁷ The connection between being able to imagine what it is to be the other and the ability to commit violence against that other is clear to McEwan:

If the hijackers had been able to imagine themselves into the thoughts and feelings of the passengers, they would have been unable to proceed. It is hard to be cruel once you permit yourself to enter the mind of your victim. Imagining what it is like to be someone other than yourself is at the core of our humanity. It is the essence of compassion, and it is the beginning of morality.⁵⁵⁸

If narrative is that which forms human bonds, McEwan’s claim implies that the inability to imagine the other as subject is just as much a failure of narrative as it is a failure of imagination. Indeed, McEwan elsewhere states that the installation of a stronger narrative framework has the potential to blot out the possibility of empathetic imagination: ‘It’s a human universal . . . being able to think our way into the minds of others . . . you have to bring into line some sort of powerful ideology or some crazed religious certainty in order to blot out

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid., 222–223. Italics in original.

⁵⁵⁷ Ian McEwan, ‘Only Love Then Oblivion’, *The Guardian* (London, September 15, 2001). It is a theme McEwan has frequently returned to in his writing and interviews concerning the attacks. For example, see McEwan, ‘Faith’.

⁵⁵⁸ McEwan, ‘Only Love.’

that human instinct.⁵⁵⁹ Narrative may be a human universal that mediates our sociality and structures our subjectivity, but that does not by any means guarantee the prevalence of empathetic narrative. Violence, as Perowne's encounters with Baxter demonstrate, is the consequence of a failure of narrative as much as it is a failure of the imagination. The stark analysis is that there is a direct link between the Western concern with 'problems of reference' and the violence unleashed upon America and Europe from 2001 onwards. The West, in other words, has failed to provide a sufficiently powerful narrative of what it is to be a subject, and in doing so has left itself vulnerable, as other narratives come to shape how the West is perceived. This would seem paradoxical in the face of the apparent global permeation of Western media, but as Perowne's experience of televisual media suggests, such a permeation does not necessarily mean that any sense of what it is to be a Western subject is communicated. Rather, the media acts as a means of shutting down narrative in favour of stereotype, of reducing the lived to the prefigured. Ferguson draws a striking parallel between television news and dementia, arguing that:

the news prompts Henry to participate in an emotion of attention even when he's not certain what his views are. Full as it is of names, numbers, events and eventfulness, the news in fact strangely resembles the conversation Henry has with his demented mother . . . Henry's mother participates in affection without understanding, as do the other residents of her home . . . not recognising him but, in their incapacity to recognize particular faces and names, recognizing that he might be someone they love.⁵⁶⁰

What are the consequences of the claim that 'the cycling of the news yields attention without content' when the audience is not in some way predisposed to empathy, if not affection, by the narratives that shape their lives? If one's only access to the other is mediated in such a way, or in other forms of representation that similarly reduce narrative possibilities to a few prevalent forms, the implication is that one is being asked to pay attention to the other without gaining any sense of what it is to be the other. One is already supposed to understand the narrative that shapes that other, just as the residents of the nursing home know to anticipate a face they love without recognising that face. For those not immersed in these narrative structures, what the media ends up communicating is lack of content, the absence of the other.

The Western media's global communication of absence leads McEwan to place the moral imperative on literature to shut down its Blanchotian terrorism. In this light, *Saturday* is a text that makes much larger claims for itself than are suggested by the accessibility of the

⁵⁵⁹ McEwan, 'Faith and Doubt.'

⁵⁶⁰ Frances Ferguson, 'The Way We Love Now: Ian McEwan, *Saturday*, and Personal Affection in the Information Age', *Representations* 100, no. Fall (2007): 49.

prose and narrative form. It is a text that simultaneously enacts what it is advocating, an accurate narration of what it is to be a particular kind of subject in a particular socio-historical context, in order that others can 'imagine' what it is like to be this person. The fact that reviewers such as Banville found Henry Perowne unpalatable and smug is perhaps beside the point,⁵⁶¹ for to make Perowne a more sympathetic character would again be a failure of narrative, a disingenuous attempt to put a particular audience at ease that betrays the ethical formulations of the text. *Saturday* becomes a text that attempts to shut down the possibility of violence by narrating the life of an individual to give others access to his subjectivity. As an art form that makes use of the same materials that structure us, literature has a particular duty to make sure that it 'communicates,' that it 'means' something. This 'something' needs an understanding of language that permits language the ability to apprehend the real world, that allows a transparent, if not entirely rigid, connection between the word and that which it represents. For McEwan, the mind is the guarantor of this connection, taking up a position once reserved for God in its capacity to inspire wonder thanks to scientific revelation. By insisting on language's grounding the material in the form of the mind, McEwan arrests literature's potentially dangerous assumption of the movement of language formation for itself. In contrast to Irigaray's cultivation of difference and embodied culture, in *Saturday* it is only by reaffirming the umbilical connection of language to the material world that we can securely represent who we are to the other, as well as maintaining a sense of ourselves as subjects, and in doing so, protect ourselves from material violence. For by maintaining this connection, we populate the space between knowing the other and seeing the other, between knowledge in absence and knowledge gleaned by direct experience with wonder rather than terror. For McEwan, in a century so far shaped by narratives of global terrorism, literature has a duty to counteract the terror opened up by relativist language and thought, by vacuous representation, and so must anchor narratives in the wonder of reality. To do otherwise is to risk allowing alternative narratives to populate that gap and sculpt the interpretation. To do otherwise is to risk existing as little more than wet matter in the eyes of the other.

The New Bodily Guarantor

McEwan's literary ethics simultaneously approaches and eschews something resembling Irigaray's embodied culture. He argues literature must communicate something of the reality of what it is to be subject, but at the same time, he locates that subject in the mind, not in the body as a whole. As such, McEwan remains within the conventions of a phallic

⁵⁶¹ See John Banville, 'A Day in the Life', *The New York Review of Books* (New York, May 26, 2005).

economy, overwriting the flesh of the body with narratives that mirror the scientific classification of genes into alphabetical symbols. Nowhere does this forgetting of the body become more apparent than in Daisy's recitation of Arnold's 'Dover Beach.' For if *Saturday* is a manifesto for the reconnection of the literary work with the human narrative in order to establish ethical relations with the other, how do we read the paradoxical moment in which Daisy recites the poetry of another and is saved from violence as she is mistaken for that other?

Hillard offers two readings of the scene: the initial one in which 'the "Dover Beach" episode appears to elaborately establish male authority in order to disavow feminine influence,' an interpretation which if correct creates 'a scene of richly layered chauvinism, in which the nation – rendered concomitantly as the female body shielded by male literary heritage – deflects an attack by forces rendered simultaneously as philistine, anarchist, and terrorist.'⁵⁶² In her second reading, Hillard uses the intertextuality of the novel, as well as the literary history of 'Dover Beach' to suggest an alternative, drawing attention to Woolf's apparent echoing of 'Dover Beach' in *Mrs Dalloway*, as Clarissa repairs her dress.⁵⁶³ In this reading:

"Dover Beach" in *Saturday* becomes an intertext of *Mrs. Dalloway* through the very act of Victorian intertextuality. *Saturday*, then, is a novel by a man in which a woman recites a poem by a man that reflects a novel by woman in which a woman recites a poem by a man.⁵⁶⁴

For Hillard, enacting a re-reading of *Saturday* suggested by the repeated reading of 'Dover Beach' changes Daisy's ventriloquism into an explicit recognition of 'the novel as largely dependent on its feminine predecessors.'⁵⁶⁵ Without disputing the significance of this observation, Hillard's re-reading is a generous one, not least because it ignores the specificity of the figure of Daisy in two important respects. Firstly, unlike Mrs Dalloway, Daisy is herself a poet and has her own text available to read, although Daisy's sexually evocative lines are actually those of another male poet, Craig Raine.⁵⁶⁶ Thus, the voice of the female poet is doubly silenced, both within the text by her turn to Arnold and beyond the text by the selection of a male poet's work to express female sexual desire. Secondly, the chain of associations Hillard draws on to counter claims of 'chauvinism' brushes over the specificity of the fictional figures used in such recitations. Of particular significance here is the strikingly specific figure of a naked, pregnant poet under threat of rape. Hillard's re-reading seems to

⁵⁶² Clark Hillard, 'Re-reading McEwan', 188.

⁵⁶³ Ibid., 200.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid., 201.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid., 202.

⁵⁶⁶ McEwan, *Saturday*, Acknowledgements.

place this extraordinary figuring of the female poet alongside the domesticity of Clarissa Dalloway repairing a dress, without acknowledging the possibility that in writing such a scene, McEwan makes very specific choices, not least that of introducing the “extraordinary” into his “day-in-the-life-of” narrative. While Baxter’s invasion of the Perowne household may not be a reflection of daily life, it does remain within the narrative of “normal” criminal violence. The prospect of raping a pregnant woman moves the scene past the more familiar figuring of criminal violence into the “extraordinary,” the psychotic, as signalled by Nigel’s immediate rejection of rape and Baxter’s apparent unease when Daisy’s pregnancy is revealed.⁵⁶⁷ The apparent abandonment of the everyday narrative, alongside the deliberate use of an image as evocative as the vulnerable, naked, pregnant woman are clear indicators that to forget or pass over Daisy’s body within this scene is to perhaps miss a vital connection McEwan wants us to make. Indeed, the presence of Daisy’s body propels Baxter’s intentions into the exceptional status accorded to terrorism, an “illegitimate” illegitimate crime.

In a striking manifestation of Irigaray’s figuring of the phallic symbolic, it is around the presence of the maternal body that *Saturday*’s theme coalesce: the rhetoric of science confronts the poetic and the literary; the protective fraternal and paternal masculinities of Theo and Perowne confront the deviant, violent masculinity of Baxter. Morrison suggests such use of gender is nothing new in McEwan’s work, as he repeatedly use gender ‘as the structural focus for a broader spiral of temporal and historical concerns,’⁵⁶⁸ not least in McEwan’s continual revisiting of the opposition between rational and intuitive modes of thought, modes embodied by male and female characters respectively. In his critique of *Black Dogs* and *Enduring Love*, Morrison argues that ‘[c]haracteristically for McEwan’s fiction, a male narrator becomes the focus of the text’s attempt to negotiate a new understanding of personal and social time by mediating between these feminine-and masculine-identified modes of seeing and remembering.’⁵⁶⁹ Morrison is not alone in arguing that what these oppositional relationships repeatedly serve to do is draw narrative into question, to undermine ‘the ease and potency of narrative as a guarantor of memory or knowledge’ in a way that leaves us with a sense that narrative ‘is barely adequate for this task.’⁵⁷⁰ If narratives are always in the hands of a male protagonist, the implication is that the presence of the feminine works to undermine and expose the inadequacies of the easy and potent rational narrative. In doing so, however, the feminine opens up that narrative to new possibilities that ultimately lead to a more

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid., 219.

⁵⁶⁸ Jago Morrison, ‘Narration and Unease in Ian McEwan’s Later Fiction’, *Critique* 42, no. 3 (2001): paragraph 17.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid., paragraph 18.

comprehensive articulation of the experience, history, or moment that the rational masculine narrative is attempting to describe. In essence, the combination of feminine and masculine modes produces the most “adequate” narrative, one that connects the facts of the situation to human experience. Daisy has been such a troubling presence throughout the text, arguing literature’s corner in the face of her father’s scientifically-grounded rationality, but it is not her own words she uses to disrupt the brutal masculinity represented by Baxter and his accomplice. It is Daisy’s voice reciting Arnold’s words that dissipates Baxter’s violent intent. The insinuation is that her pregnant body may have had the power to defer the moment, but it is the communication of a humanity that transcends sexuate boundaries that overturns the possibility of violence altogether. The insinuation is that the body becomes ‘meaningless’ in the face of the universal humanity narration permits us to communicate. The ability to convey one’s interiority to the other protects the flesh, not the exposure of the mutual vulnerability of that flesh, or what it is to be that flesh. Daisy’s fragility and the dependency of her unborn child on her body are not enough to protect her from violence. Rather, she is protected by the wonder of Arnold’s words, by the merging of her identity with that of another, masculine subject, to produce a narrative that appears to transcend sexuate identity and thus convey an uninflected ‘humanness’.

Literary language is thus saved from Perowne’s condemnation in the form of a poem. If narrative’s primary aim is to communicate what it is to be a particular subject in order that the other can imagine the subject, McEwan seems to come perilously close to advocating the abandonment of literary works altogether in favour of biography and autobiography. Yet selecting a poem as the catalyst for the transformative communication of self to the other, McEwan is demonstrating that the literary, the poetic, need not be sacrificed in the demand for dutiful literature. ‘Dover Beach’ is not a poem that sets out to trouble the connection between language and the world; rather it relies on that connection to bring the scene to life, and to establish an image located in space and time that then reverberates back into the language he has chosen. Furthermore, the text is designed to appeal to the listener or reader, appealing to them directly as ‘you’, enfolding them into the poem with ‘love’, ‘we’ and ‘us’. The language brings the scene to the audience, as well as including the audience in the scene. The need to convey the thoughts and feelings upon witnessing the waves rolling across England’s shoreline is paramount. Literary language, poetic language, is thus permissible as long as it used to ‘let us be true/ To one another,’⁵⁷¹ rather than to co-opt for itself the negation of the world that precedes meaning. *Saturday* suggests that when language is used to

⁵⁷¹ Matthew Arnold, ‘Dover Beach’, in *Saturday* (London: Vintage Books, 2006) as reprinted at the end of McEwan’s novel.

narrate a moment of existence, the humanity apprehended within that narrative will transcend not only cultural difference, but any difference inscribed on or by the body. An unmarried, pregnant English woman in a modern middle-class home can recite the words of a long-dead, Victorian man, and be recognised as a subject in doing so.

Hillard, then, is perhaps both correct in stating that the 'Dover Beach' recital is not a straightforward chauvinistic moment, and also overly generous in asserting this moment is an acknowledgement of feminine literary forebears. It is in fact a disavowal of the validity of such distinctions as relevant in the face of a universal humanity, a humanity so universal, so inscribed in our natures, that the effect is the same no matter who communicates it to whom. This universalism immediately runs into problems if we consider that the imperative McEwan seems to be positing is that literature conveys within it something of what it is to be a particular subject. If literature is under an ethical obligation to help us 'be true to one another,' how does this square with the apparent idea that communicating something of our universal humanity is what makes us present to the other? And how do we read Daisy's recital of the words of another in order to be recognised as a subject in Baxter's eyes? After all, it is Daisy's use of 'Dover Beach' to answer Baxter's demand for poetry that leads to Perowne and Theo assaulting Baxter.

In her analysis of the role of narrative in *Saturday* and *Atonement*, Salisbury argues that McEwan's turn to science, neuroscience in particular, in search of a model of subjectivity has led to a consequent scorn for the psychoanalytic models used in many of the Humanities, not least literary departments. According to Salisbury, whilst psychoanalysis could only get into the mind via what came out of the mouth, the advances in neuroscience mean there is no longer a need to rely on such interpretations in McEwan's view. Crucially, Salisbury tells us that McEwan replaces the mother and child bond, recognised as pivotal in a variety of ways across the psychoanalytic spectrum, with narrative:

[F]or McEwan, in place of a literal mother and child, it is the sympathetic understanding forged by particular kinds of narrative that uses, supports, and articulates that 'more-or-less automatic understanding of what it means to be someone else' . . . ⁵⁷²

The formative contact between the mother and infant, or in Butler's case, between the infants and the bodies that sustain them in their state of greatest dependency on the other, is dismissed as a formative presence. If narrative is to be considered foundational to subjectivity, it seems it must be at the expense of any recognition of the mother/infant bond. Touch, the lived relation, the complexity of flesh and nourishment between the infant and the mother

⁵⁷² Salisbury, 'Narration', 907.

comes to be only that which sustains life, not that which shapes it. Right from the outset, the body becomes little more than the container for a mind that will be primarily sculpted by the interaction of genes, neurons and social narratives. Just as the turn to the body for an ethics moves past the flesh when informed by a particular scientific methodology, so too McEwan's understanding of narrative as foundational to human identity becomes curiously skinless, despite the desire to keep language from straying too far from its material roots. In taking the mind to be the guarantor of the connection between language and the material world, McEwan has equated the subject with the wet stuff of the brain, removing the maternal body from any role in the formation of the subject, and thus any concept of subjectivity that relies on the lived relation rather than the purely narratively-constituted one. It is only by performing such a sublimation of the maternal body that one can validate the universality of narrative, as the possibility of embodied difference, sexuate difference, disappears with the dismissal of the lived relation as forming the subject. Indeed, in modelling the subject as being situated inside the body, narrative and language in general must become a means of facilitating relations between inside and out, in place of the disavowed flesh. Salisbury describes McEwan's fiction as attempting to facilitate 'the penetration of another consciousness' in order to produce 'an empathetic act of meeting, a connection with another that is recognised as outside the self, but who shares its concerns and demonstrates, in McEwan's own terms, 'not how exotically different we are from one another, but how exotically similar we are.'⁵⁷³ Knowledge of the other in McEwan's model requires a penetration of the other, gaining access to their interior life, moving past the surface of their skin. It is only by placing oneself in the mind of the other that one gains a sense of a shared bond, a bond that then acts to ensure the flesh is no longer at risk from the other. Empathy is dependent on narrative, and narrative is penetrative. Given the position to which the material, maternal-feminine is relegated in McEwan's model of subjectivity, it is no surprise to see his concept of narrative follows a phallically-informed logic.

Narrative, and by extension, language become a means of penetrating the other to guard against the exploitation of one's own material vulnerability, a materiality that is disavowed in the very process of becoming a subject precisely because of its inherent threat to the subject's completeness. The analogy here is plain: language becomes a means through which the subject obfuscates its existence as mere wet stuff in order to preserve itself. It becomes a tool used to access the other, and to cloak one's own vulnerability from the other by appealing to that other. It becomes the guarantor of sameness, transcending difference of all kinds, not least the difference that creates the very wet stuff that we all are, and thus

⁵⁷³ Ibid., 902 citing; Ian McEwan, 'Ian McEwan: The Salon Interview', July 2009, www.salon.com/books/int/1998/03/cov-si_31int.html.

makes us always already vulnerable to one another. The danger comes in this appeal to the other, in the two-way nature of the process of narration. For in McEwan's fleshless formulation, allowing oneself to be penetrated by the other is to come perilously close to adopting the position of the feminine, to risk becoming like Perowne's London: open, vulnerable, passively waiting for the other to make use of us. It is no surprise, then, that McEwan chooses Arnold's 'Dover Beach' as representative of language's ability to arouse awareness of our subjectivity in the other. For as Hillard and others note,⁵⁷⁴ it is a poem that reflects on the solidity of England as its empire is in turmoil, finding a melancholy comfort in the permanence of England's cliffs even as 'we are here as on a darkling plain/ Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,/ Where ignorant armies clash by night.'⁵⁷⁵ In times of turmoil, when we must reach out to the other and lay ourselves open to them, it is more important than ever to have a sense of one's solid identity, to clearly define one's place in the world. For McEwan, as for those who proclaimed the death of feminism in the U.S., after September 11th, 2001, it is more important than ever to know who we are and to assert the unambiguously what we represent. In the face of a globalised world that facilitates the transmission of terror, *Saturday* suggests that British literature has a duty to communicate to the world what it is to be British; and what it is to be British in McEwan's formulation is to value a universal humanity above all else. If Gordimer and Lessing figure the body as a place that resists narrative definitions, for McEwan, the body becomes the potential guarantor of British literature's moral high-ground as it generates an ethics that holds the potential for all humanity to be heard. McEwan's approach thus constructs the phallic British male as the arbiter of the ethical.

McEwan's turn to the materiality of the body thus reinstalls the notions of mastery that permeate the epistemology of terrorism. Given that we have seen that McEwan's notion of the body rests on the same conceptual ground as terrorism discourses, this is not surprising. What is perhaps more concerning is McEwan's willingness to accept terrorism discourses' rejection of ambiguity, an ambiguity that proved vital in providing a critical space in Gordimer and Lessing. Moreover, in foreclosing the possibility that the line between self and terrorist Other is never distinct, McEwan has reinstalled conservative notions of masculine and feminine, as manifested in Daisy's need for protection and inability to speak for herself. Whereas in Gordimer and Lessing, the possibility of sexuate difference created room for critical reflection, by the time we reach *Saturday*, sexuate difference is precisely that which must be forgotten in the name of a universal humanity. So has the emergence of terrorism

⁵⁷⁴ Clark Hillard, 'Re-reading McEwan', 12.

⁵⁷⁵ Arnold, 'Dover Beach'.

discourses as a global narrative in the wake of September 11th, 2001, fundamentally colonised our symbolic spaces to such an extent that it is impossible to turn to our embodied experience as a means to formulate an incarnate ethics? If McEwan is writing in response to terrorism's infiltration of the global sphere, Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* is set in Manhattan, before, during, and after the attacks. Perhaps by turning to a novel that takes the September 11th attacks as its physical context that we can find something resembling Irigaray's sensible transcendental.

Chapter 4: Embodying Terror and Figuring Response-ability in Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*

If McEwan shares Baudrillard's pessimism about the media's impact on the individual's capacity to respond spontaneously to the world around them, Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007) is concerned with complicating this bleak hypothesis. Unlike McEwan's *Saturday*, DeLillo's novel centres on the Tuesday of the September 11th attacks, focusing on the site of the most spectacular atrocity committed that morning, Manhattan. To do so, DeLillo brings together the narratives of Keith Neudecker, a man working in the World Trade Center's North Tower on the day of the attack, his wife Lianne, who watches the events unfold on television in her Manhattan apartment, and Hammad, one of the perpetrators of the attacks. Through the interaction of these narrative strands, DeLillo draws into question the possibility that the terrorist attack can induce a uniform reaction in the media's global audience. Moreover, just as it is an overwriting of embodied difference that facilitates McEwan and Baudrillard's notion of a mass audience, in *Falling Man* it is the specificity of each individual's body that works to problematize the presumed efficacy of the media's ability to transmit a universal experience of terror. In doing so, DeLillo echoes Gordimer and Lessing, as he figures the body as a site of resistance, as the differences between Keith, Lianne, and Hammad's experiences pose a direct challenge to the ease with which September 11th was inserted into global narratives and colonised by Bush's rhetoric of "us" and "them". By dismantling the assumption that they constituted a coherent, identifiable "event", DeLillo's turn to the individual's experience thus coincides with Derrida and Žižek's responses to the rhetoric around the attacks. As such, *Falling Man* both shares Baudrillard's sense that representation – particularly the image – has the potential to foreclose the possibility of response, yet at the same time suggests that cultivating an embodied perception can articulate a response that has not been pre-figured by representation. In essence, DeLillo suggests that it is a particular 'mode of seeing' that has allowed the September 11th attacks to be appropriated into the wider narratives that dictated the US response, and thus turns to the body to explore the potential for alternative modes of perception in order to open up the possibility of a spontaneous response. Perhaps most strikingly, as DeLillo rethinks the perception of terrorism through the body, he brings sexual difference to the fore, not simply by using the husband and wife relation to draw gendered comparisons, but by exposing the shared ground between the masculinities of the victim and the terrorist. As we shall see, the vertical and horizontal natures of both the relations between the characters and their individual connection to the world play a vital role in these

configurations. Perhaps it is in *Falling Man*, a novel that directly resists the power of abstract representation in favour of embodied perception and that is permeated with notions of vertical and horizontal relations, that we will find a means to articulate how Irigaray's sensible transcendental can help us cultivate an ethical relation when we are faced with the terrorist Other.

Looking at September 11th, 2001

Like Gordimer and Lessing before him, DeLillo's novelistic engagement with the context surrounding real terrorist violence received a mixed and often scornful critical reception upon publication. *Falling Man* begins and ends with Keith emerging from the World Trade Center just as the South Tower collapses, with the narratives in-between tracing both Keith and Lianne's experiences in the days, months, and eventually years after the attacks, intercut with brief sections of narrative that follow Hammad's progress towards terrorism, ending as the plane he has hijacked crashes in Keith's building. As Keith and Lianne absorb the impact of the attacks, and try to return to something like a normal life, they momentarily repair their broken marriage before once again going their separate ways. Three years after the attacks, Keith has become a full-time gambler, living an anonymous life passing through casinos and hotels, while Lianne and the couple's son Justin have re-established their pre-September 11th routine. Crucial to both Keith and Lianne's attempts to come to terms with what unfolded in Manhattan on that day are bodily experiences, encounters with others' bodies, and interaction with images, be they media or artistic representations. For Lianne in particular, these elements come together in the form of David Janiak, a performance artist whose act Lianne witnesses twice in the text. Appearing at random sites across Manhattan in the months after the attacks, Janiak suspends himself from architectural elements with a harness and adopts a pose that all those watching would not fail to recognise: 'A man was dangling there, above the street, upside down. He wore a business suit, one leg bent up, arms at his sides.'⁵⁷⁶ In his performances, Janiak becomes a living embodiment of Richard Drew's now infamous photograph of a man plunging from the World Trade Center towers after the attacks, which has become known as 'The Falling Man', 'A Falling Man' or simply 'Falling Man.'⁵⁷⁷

For many, the figure of Janiak became emblematic of the overall failure of *Falling Man* as a response to the September 11th atrocities. For example, O'Hagan argues:

⁵⁷⁶ Don DeLillo, *Falling Man* (London: Picador, 2007), 33.

⁵⁷⁷ See Nancy Lee, Lonnie Schlein, and Mitchel Levitas, eds., *A Nation Challenged: A Visual History of 9/11 and Its Aftermath* (London: The New York Times, Jonathan Cape, 2002), 23.

There appear to be few writers in America now who could bring us to know what might have been going through the minds of those people as they fell from the building – or going through the minds of those hijackers as they met their targets – but there is no shortage of those who would do what DeLillo does, which is to show us an anxious, educated woman watching a performance artist hanging upside down from a metal beam in Pershing Square. It is a form of intellectual escapism.⁵⁷⁸

O'Hagan's ire is shared by many, including Tim Junod, the journalist whose 2003 article 'The Falling Man' in *Esquire* attempted to identify the man in Drew's image.⁵⁷⁹ Junod's piece protested against the taboo that almost instantaneously sprang up around the images of those falling from the Towers, arguing that marking these images as off-limits signalled Americans taking it 'upon ourselves to deem their deaths unworthy of witness – because we have somehow deemed the act of witness, in this one regard, unworthy of us.'⁵⁸⁰ For Junod, DeLillo's decision to figure Drew's image as a performance is yet another failure to bear witness to the lives of those who died in such a horrific manner:

I have a pretty good idea who the Falling Man was, and he was neither a performance artist nor a totem of severed human connections. He was a *man*, and his tragedy was not that he made it possible for people not to love their families; his tragedy was that he loved his family, and was loved in return, and that his connection to them continues in the afterlife of Drew's indelible image, and is unbearable.⁵⁸¹

For both Junod and O'Hagan, Janiak represents *Falling Man's* eschewal of duty, suggesting that both critics follow McEwan's sense that in the wake of September 11th, literature has a moral obligation to shrug off aesthetic flights on fancy in favour of representing reality. O'Hagan makes this patently clear when he insists that in Janiak, DeLillo represses the fact that Junod's investigations revealed it was very likely that Drew's 'Falling Man' was Jonathan Briley:

Jonathan Briley . . . was flesh and blood, not just an idea. He was born on March 5, 1968. He was six feet five. His father was a preacher. He suffered from asthma and had a wife called Hilary. He died sixty-five minutes twenty seconds after Mohamed Atta, and is currently awaiting a writer sufficiently uncoerced by the politics of art to tell his story.⁵⁸²

Echoing McEwan, O'Hagan argues that literature addressing the attacks has a duty to pay tribute to the lives of those who perished by articulating the truth of their existence. As such, O'Hagan posits that 'September 11 offered a few hours when American novelists could only sit

⁵⁷⁸ Andrew O'Hagan, 'Racing Against Reality', *The New York Review of Books* 54, no. 11 (2007): paragraph 38.

⁵⁷⁹ Tom Junod, 'The Falling Man', *Esquire*, September 2003.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid., paragraph 21.

⁵⁸¹ Tom Junod, 'The Man Who Invented 9/11', *Esquire*, May 2007, paragraph 8., http://www.esquire.com/fiction/book-review/delillo?click=main_sr. Italics in original.

⁵⁸² O'Hagan, 'Racing', paragraph 39.

at home while journalism taught them fierce lessons . . . Actuality showed its own naked art that day.⁵⁸³ Similarly, Junod insists that:

[W]hen the planes hit and the buildings went down we entered the “age of nonfiction,” when journalism, even journalism as modest in means as one of those Portraits of Grief, is able to grasp what’s happened – and, more to the point, what’s happening – to us more than fiction can, even fiction by our most accomplished and ambitious writers.⁵⁸⁴

Journalism, then, not literature, was the mode of writing that could fittingly memorialise the suffering and the loss brought about by the attacks. With its concern for the brute details and the facts of each individual victim’s life, journalism grounded its representations of the fallen in reality and attempted to convey a fitting sense of what had been lost. By contrast, literature’s concern with aesthetics and willingness to stray from the factual rendered it both ineffectual and potentially amoral when faced with such brutal reality. For Junod and O’Hagan, DeLillo’s failure to embrace the journalistic aesthetic that so eloquently captured the meaning of the attacks meant *Falling Man* did little more than appropriate the lives of the dead for the purposes of aesthetic navel-gazing.

In accusing DeLillo of aesthetic amorality, Junod and O’Hagan capture a wider sense that journalistic or realist approaches are the appropriate means for both representing and understanding September 11th. Eric Fischl’s sculpture, ‘Tumbling Woman’ was originally displayed outside the Rockerfeller Center in New York to commemorate the dead, but was quickly covered over, before being screened from view and subsequently removed, as it produced widespread offense as people felt it was disrespectful to those who had died falling from the Towers.⁵⁸⁵ Similarly, the composer Karlheinz Stockhausen was reviled worldwide as he responded to journalistic prompting at a press conference on September 16th, 2001, and described the attacks of five days before as ‘the greatest work of art that is possible’.⁵⁸⁶

Tommasini spoke for many as he condemned Stockhausen’s claim:

Art may be hard to define, but whatever art is, it’s a step removed from reality. A theatrical depiction of suffering may be art; real suffering is not. Because the art of photography often blurs this distinction, it can make us uncomfortable. Real people,

⁵⁸³ Ibid., paragraph 29.

⁵⁸⁴ Junod, ‘Man Who’, paragraph 3.

⁵⁸⁵ See Susan Lurie, ‘Falling Persons and National Embodiment: The Reconstruction of Safe Spectatorship in the Photographic Record of 9/11’, in *Terror, Culture, Politics: Rethinking 9/11*, ed. Daniel J. Sherman and Terry Nardin (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 44–68; and Junod, ‘Falling Man’. Ironically, Junod defends Fischl’s sculpture as doing justice to those whose deaths America refused to witness.

⁵⁸⁶ Anthony Tommasini, ‘Music; The Devil Made Him Do It’, *The New York Times* (New York, September 30, 2001), paragraph 2, http://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/30/arts/music-the-devil-made-him-do-it.html?ref=anthony_tommasini&pagewanted=print. While Tommasini’s translation of Stockhausen’s words is controversial, this part remains faithful to the original statement.

sometimes suffering people, have been photography's unwitting subjects. That's why we have photojournalism, to keep things clear.⁵⁸⁷

Here Tommasini neatly captures the understanding that circulates beneath the condemnation of DeLillo and Fischl's artistic responses and underpins McEwan's concept of literary duty. There is a necessity to maintain a distinction between reality and artistic interpretation, particularly when the photography that makes us aware of the brutality of the real carries with it aesthetic overtones. When presented with such a blurring of the boundary between the aesthetic and the real, Tommasini implies that we, as viewers, have a duty to remember into which category the image in front of us falls. We have a duty to see things in the correct mode, in this instance, the mode of photojournalism, regardless of the temptation to stray into the aesthetic. To do otherwise is to prove oneself so immoral or disconnected from reality that one merits a stay in a mental institution; Tommasini recommends Stockhausen should 'be confined to a psychiatric clinic.'⁵⁸⁸

O'Hagan, Junod, and indeed McEwan, therefore arguably posit that in the wake of terrorist violence, literature should replicate photojournalism's gesture, testifying to the reality that has passed before our eyes, rather than blurring the boundaries between the aesthetic and the real. Not only does this echo the insistence of terrorism discourses on the realism of its prose, it also suggests that photography has the capacity to transparently represent reality. Such an understanding of photojournalism relies on what Roland Barthes' describes as the photograph's ability to act as 'a certificate of presence.'⁵⁸⁹ For Barthes, the photograph 'flows back from presentation to retention,'⁵⁹⁰ for as an image that is constituted by the reality it comes to represent, the photograph makes a persistent claim for the 'former existence' of its referent.⁵⁹¹ Unlike other forms of representation, the photograph haunts the present with the 'that-has-been,'⁵⁹² insisting on the fact that what it represents took place in actuality even if it has now passed into history. Moreover, because the photograph is constituted by the reality it represents, it achieves a '*[t]otality-of-Image*'; not only because it is already an image in itself, but because this very special image gives itself out as complete . . . The photographic image is full, crammed: no room, nothing can be added to it.'⁵⁹³ In contrast to the cinematic image, whose referent shifts as the image moves, the photograph's silent, stubborn assertion of one

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid., paragraph 7.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid., paragraph 11.

⁵⁸⁹ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (London: Vintage, 2000), 87.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid., 89–90.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid.

⁵⁹² Ibid., 89.

⁵⁹³ Ibid., 89. Italics in original.

particular truth means it resists narrative flow, 'it is *without future* (this is its pathos, its melancholy; in it, no protensity).'⁵⁹⁴ Even when surrounded by words, given a caption, or placed in a series, the photograph will inevitably slip the bonds of narration and stand alone, outside the press of narrative, linear time. The insistence that literature must remain faithful to the facts surrounding September 11th thus suggests that the literary response should emulate the photographic precisely because nothing more can be added to the images that emerged from Manhattan that day. The images of the attacks, Drew's image among them, resolutely foreclose the possibility of aesthetic response, for they say it all. To insert these images into a literary narrative or to overwrite the reality they testify to with fictional creations is to fail to remain faithful to the truth they present.

But if this understanding of photojournalism echoes Barthes' figuring of the photograph as the 'that-has-been,' Barthes' own thinking on the experience of looking at the photograph overturns the notion that we can make a definitive distinction between the photojournalistic and the aesthetic, for he argues that the photograph facilitates two specific experiences of perception. The ability to distinguish between the photojournalistic and aesthetic photograph corresponds to what Barthes describes as the *studium*, a form of looking in which we interpret the image in a culturally-determined framework. But Barthes also describes the *punctum*, a deeply personal and unpredictable response as something within the image pierces through the cultural framework and touches our consciousness in such a way as to take us to 'a kind of subtle *beyond* – as if the image launched desire beyond what it permits us to see.'⁵⁹⁵ Not only does the *punctum* challenge the assumption that we are all capable of reading the photograph in a culturally-prescribed manner, its capacity to 'launch' the desire to move into the beyond corresponds with Paul de Man's figuring of the aesthetic experience. Bringing together models of the aesthetic temperament put forward by Georg Lukacs, Oskar Becker and the psychoanalyst Ludwig Binswanger, de Man detects a 'phenomenology of heights and depths'⁵⁹⁶ permeating these figurings of the aesthetic. Through his reading of these works, de Man argues aesthetic desire arises from an acute discomfort with the spatial and temporal confines of everyday experience, which can only be alleviated by rising above the 'excessive presence of time,' allowing the artist sufficient freedom from historical time to make the 'leap' needed for aesthetic creation.⁵⁹⁷ Artistic creation, in this figuration, is the result of the fall back to earth from this aesthetic height, as 'the kind of knowledge contained

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid., 40. Italics in original.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid., 59. Italics in original.

⁵⁹⁶ Paul de Man, 'The Sublimation of the Self', in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1996), 46.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid., 45.

in art is specifically the knowledge of this fall, the transformation of the experience of falling into an act of knowledge.⁵⁹⁸ But alongside the aesthetic impulse for the vertical transcendence of everyday temporality, de Man draws attention to Binswanger's inclusion of the possibility of 'an involuntary ascent', 'an upward fall.'⁵⁹⁹ For Binswanger, just as the fall implies an involuntary tumbling from a vertical position, so too is it possible to envision being propelled to aesthetic heights against one's will. While de Man associates this experience of being 'carried away' with the Romantics, if this ascent is not voluntary, there is no reason to suppose this movement would be confined to those already open to the aesthetic realm. If Barthes' *punctum* launches us out of a culturally-constructed sphere of looking, can we not thus read it as such a moment of involuntary ascent into the aesthetic? Once again, like Blanchot's language, the very means of representation that is supposed to facilitate an unambiguous connection to the world contains within it an invitation to move beyond the confines of that world. It is photography's invitation to understand the real aesthetically that fuels the desire to establish an impermeable divide between the photojournalistic and the aesthetic by asserting that there are appropriate ways of perceiving images. Thus, can we not read the demands that literature replicate the realist aesthetic of journalism and pay homage to the photograph's ability to capture reality as arising from the recognition that, like Blanchot's literary language, the photograph in fact renders the real open to terroristic appropriation? In foreclosing the aesthetic capacity of the photojournalistic, the gesture is to once again colonise the symbolic space to secure one's own position as the epistemological master.

But just as Barthes argues that our own personal experience of the photograph has the potential to disrupt the culturally-constituted perception of that image, so *Falling Man* repeatedly suggests that our bodies foreclose the possibility that we will be able to perceive the world in a pre-figured way. The experiences of Lianne's Alzheimer's group dramatically illustrate the body's capacity to destabilise even the most basic connection between what one "knows" and what one perceives. As the disease does ever greater damage to his brain, Benny T. cannot convince himself that his trousers are on correctly:

He was in a mind and body that were not his, looking at the fit. The pants did not seem to fit right. He took them off and put them on. He shook them out. He began to think they were someone else's pants, in his house, draped over his chair.⁶⁰⁰

Carl B., another sufferer, slips into moments where he can no longer establish a connection between what his eyes perceive and his own body:

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid., 48.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid., 46.

⁶⁰⁰ DeLillo, *Falling*, 94.

There it was, in my right hand. But the right hand could not seem to find its way to the left wrist. There was a spatial void, or a visual gap, a rift in his field of vision, and it took him some time to make the connection, hand to wrist, pointed end of wristband into buckle. To Curtis this was a moral flaw, a sin of self-betrayal.⁶⁰¹

Echoing the logic of those advocating a literary turn to journalism, Carl B. feels the rift between the visual and the body is somehow morally wrong. Alzheimer's erosion of the brain's wet matter strips away the capability to secure the connection between the acts of seeing and knowing to such an extent that Carl B. and Benny T. are left unable to operate in even the most familiar setting. But just as McEwan turns to dementia to give us a model of the "normal" mind, so DeLillo suggests that these experiences of flawed perception are extreme realisations of a failure between seeing and knowing that pervade everyday life, thanks to our embodied nature. For instance, as Keith is confronted by a horse and rider emerging from stable near Central Park, he is initially unable to consolidate what he sees with his understanding of his surroundings:

[I]t was strange, what he was seeing down by the community garden a woman in the middle of the street, on horseback, wearing a yellow hard hat and carrying a riding crop, bobbing above the traffic, and it took him a long moment to understand . . . It was something that belonged to another landscape, something inserted, a conjuring that resembled for the briefest second some half-seen image only half believed in the seeing, when the witness wonders what has happened to the meaning of things, to tree, stone, wind, simple words lost in the falling ash.⁶⁰²

Keith's understanding of what is appropriate to the city leaves him momentarily unable to comprehend the presence of something that is culturally-constructed as belonging to another landscape. His sense of the *studium* leaves him unable to interpret what passes before his eyes. Moreover, this moment of perceptual discombobulation stirs a memory of another such instance, a moment shrouded in ash where the witness was unable to discern the meaning of things. As we learn towards the end of the novel, this moment is in fact where the 'Falling Man' enters the text.

For although *Falling Man* begins as Keith walks away as the South Tower collapses, the novel enters the Tower in its final scene. As the plane plunges into the building, the everyday experience of a synchronicity between perception and understanding vanishes as Keith's office suddenly becomes an unfamiliar landscape:

He thought he saw the ceiling begin to ripple, lift and ripple. He put his arms over his head and sat knees up, face wedged between them. He was aware of vast movement and other things, smaller, unseen, objects drifting and skidding, and sounds that

⁶⁰¹ Ibid., 95.

⁶⁰² Ibid., 103.

weren't one thing or another but only sound, a shift in the basic arrangement of parts and elements.

The movement was beneath him and then all around him, massive, something undreamed. It was the tower lurching. He understood this now.⁶⁰³

Keith is no longer sure of what he sees and hears. He only thinks he saw the ceiling ripple, 'he thought he saw a man on his knees in the first pale wave of smoke and dust,'⁶⁰⁴ and he is unable to distinguish sounds from simple noise. Propelled into a landscape so unfamiliar as to be 'undreamed', Keith, like the Alzheimer's group, has to concentrate in order to get his body to perform the most basic tasks: '[h]e tried to be absolutely still and tried to breathe and tried to listen.'⁶⁰⁵ Yet even in this strange world, Keith is able to begin to read meaning into the movement of tower, to recognise the smell of jet fuel, and to understand that his colleague Rumsey's mutilated form resembles a quadriplegic.⁶⁰⁶ The absolute break-down between seeing and comprehension takes place a moment later as:

Things began to fall, one thing and then another, things singly at first, coming down and out of gaps in the ceiling, and he tried lifting Rumsey out of the chair. Then something outside, going past the window. Something went past the window, then he saw it. First it went and was gone and then he saw it and had to stand a moment staring out at nothing, holding Rumsey under the arms.⁶⁰⁷

What Keith witnesses is so outside the bounds of experience as to leave him unable to "see" it. The arrival of understanding is delayed, postponed, exposing a gap between visual perception and the ability to interpret that perception into meaningful information. This disjunction leaves Keith unable to move, floored by what he has witnessed. An instant later:

He could not stop seeing it, twenty feet away, an instant of something sideways, going past the window, white shirt, hand up, falling before he saw it. Debris in clusters came down now. There were echoes sounding down the floors and wires snapping at his face and white powder everywhere. He stood through it, holding Rumsey. The glass partition shattered. Something came down and there was a noise and then the glass shivered and broke and then the wall gave way behind him.⁶⁰⁸

Precisely what Keith has seen still eludes him, a hand and a shirt escaping his vision before he has been able to inscribe significance on their presence. Rather than a clear picture of what Keith has witnessed, we are left with a sense of movement, a simultaneous falling and sideways motion that passes beyond the text before its meaning arrives. The falling and the shirt hints to the reader that Keith has witnessed a person falling from the tower. Yet the

⁶⁰³ Ibid., 239–240.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid., 240.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid., 241.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid., 242.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid.

sideways whiteness and raised arm echo the hue and shape of the second plane entering the South Tower. Both of these inferences emerge from a point of time outside of the moment, a knowledge brought in from the future. In the moment, the 'rift' in Keith's perceptual field renders him blind to what he has witnessed. Unable to use his everyday understanding of his context to imbue what has flashed before him with meaning, Keith is left with raw perception, leaving both him and the reader bombarded by sensation as the text's structure breaks down into a relentless list of movement and noise.

While O'Hagan posits that *Falling Man* fails as a novel, as it does not allow us into 'the minds of the people as they fell,' in providing us with an embodied experience of what it is to witness such a falling, DeLillo suggests that such an imaginative attempt would be futile, if not unethical, for he opens up the possibility that witnessing such brutality first-hand renders the subject unable to instil meaning in their own experiences. In such a violently altered landscape, conventional understanding is rendered useless and so to venture into the mind of those who fell would be to reduce the unthinkable to terms that arise from the stable ground of the everyday. Instead of using the image of the 'Falling Man' as a vehicle for colonising that individual's mind with meaning external to the moment, DeLillo instead figures the body as acting like a camera, for as Hirsch reflects on the vast canon of photographs of September 11th, she argues, '[t]o photograph is to look in a different way – to look without understanding. Understanding is deferred until we see the developed image.'⁶⁰⁹ Given that we do not enter the World Trade Center until Keith has constructed a life for himself three years after the attacks, *Falling Man* not only suggests that the meaning of what Keith has witnessed takes years to develop within him, it also defers the arrival of meaning for the reader too. The possibility of understanding Keith's actions in the narrative through his experiences in the Tower is suspended until the novel's closing moments, thus the reader must revisit the text if one wants to insert Keith's behaviour into the narrative of September 11th. Rather than reading the plethora of images of the attacks as testifying to the death of non-fiction in the face of the image's profound ability to convey reality, by entering the materiality of the instant in which the 'Falling Man' passes through the text, DeLillo is in accord with Lentricchia and McAuliffe in suggesting that September 11th disrupted the *studium* in such a way as to leave all established frameworks for reading the world incapable of installing meaning upon that world; in other words, it did indeed propel us into an potentially aesthetic transcendence of the everyday insofar as it replicated:

⁶⁰⁹ Marianne Hirsch, 'The Day Time Stopped', *The Chronicle Review* 48, no. 20 (January 25, 2002): paragraph 8, <http://chronicle.com/free/v48/i20/20b01101.htm>.

what the Romantic poet Shelley meant when he said that art “strips the film of familiarity” from the world as we know it – the evil of familiarity; a stripping – like an altering of a skyline? – which is a deep cleansing of perception and a prelude to the establishment of new consciousness; in Stockhausen’s words, an act of imagination with spiritual impact on us – a jump out of security, the self-evident, out of everyday life.⁶¹⁰

But as Lentricchia and McAuliffe’s description of the moment that instigates such a perceptual cleansing as an ‘enabling destruction’⁶¹¹ implies, recognising the opening into the aesthetic such terroristic moments produce risks appropriating the suffering of others in the name of new understanding. Yet again, the bodies of others are left vulnerable to the gesture that facilitates terrorism, bringing the artist, the novelist, into close proximity with the terrorist Other. But if DeLillo turns to embodied experience to figure this stripping away of the film of reality, can we also not read *Falling Man* as navigating this perilous ethical boundary between the aesthetic and the body of the other by remaining faithful to the physicality of the photograph its title invokes? For if the photograph always testifies to the ‘that-has-been,’ would an aesthetics grounded in that image not also remain faithful to the reality that imbued the photograph with artistic qualities?

In this light, it is no coincidence that out of the myriad images that emerged from Manhattan that on September 11th, 2001, DeLillo’s text responds to Drew’s photograph for as Junod’s description of ‘Falling Man’ notes, this photograph was particularly troubling for those wishing to make a distinction between the photojournalistic and the artistic:

The man in the picture . . . is perfectly vertical, and so is in accord with the lines of the building behind him. He splits them, bisects them . . . Some people who look at the picture see stoicism, willpower, a portrait of resignation; others see something else – something discordant and therefore terrible: freedom. There is something almost rebellious in the man’s posture, as though once faced with the inevitability of death, he decided to get on with it; as though he were a missile, a spear, bent on attaining his own end . . . He will soon be travelling at upwards of 150 miles per hour, and he is upside down. In the picture, he is frozen; in his life outside the frame, he drops and keeps dropping until he disappears.⁶¹²

‘Falling Man’ brings together the aesthetic and ‘real life’ in a way that disrupts accepted modes of seeing. It is not an exaggeration to say, as Junod does, that this photograph enacts an indefinite suspension, a limitless pause that allows the viewer as much time as they want to contemplate what is before their eyes, the chance to return again and again to an unchanged moment, a suspension that becomes all the more haunting as it seems to coincide with the

⁶¹⁰ Frank Lentricchia and Jody McAuliffe, ‘Groundzeroland’, *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 2 (2002): 354.

⁶¹¹ Ibid., 354.

⁶¹² Junod, ‘Falling Man’, opening paragraph.

content of the photograph. There have been other famous images of the seconds before, or even of, the moment of death that similarly blurred the distinction between journalistic photography and aesthetic appeal in troubling ways, with images such as Eddie Adam's 'Street Execution of a Vietcong Prisoner' (1968) and perhaps to a greater extent Robert Capa's much - disputed 'Death of a Loyalist Soldier' (1936).⁶¹³ But while both of these images capture the instant before the dead or dying man completes his fall to the ground, (indeed, Capa's image is also widely known as the 'Falling Soldier'), neither image contains within it a suspension as powerful as 'Falling Man'. With Adam's photograph, the executed man (Van Lem) has yet to begin his inevitable tumble to the ground, while Capa's soldier, Federico Borrell, topples backwards, his feet losing their purchase on the ground beneath him, torso and head suspended above the ground, arm flung backwards, looking almost like a man who has missed his seat. It is only in 'Falling Man' that the complete suspension of time enacted by photography is mirrored by the complete suspension of the figure in the image. Alive but facing certain death, alive but certainly dead, with no contact with the world around him, in absolute free-fall, the man is suspended by the photograph, his passage downwards, his passage from life into death, halted by the camera. There has perhaps never been such an eloquent and poignant coincidence between the temporality of the photograph and its subject matter. As Susan Lurie, among many others, has observed '[c]ontemplating this image, one wishes that the camera's ability to freeze the moment might have made a magical intervention in the fall itself.'⁶¹⁴ Perhaps the desire 'that seeing could translate into saving' that Lurie identifies goes some way to explaining the huge photographic record of the events that unfolded in New York, both in public and private collections.⁶¹⁵ We could not reach them with our hands and so we captured them with our cameras instead.

If Lurie suggests that the photographs of the falling encapsulate a desire to rescue them from their horrific fate, *Falling Man* explores the possibility that it is in the photograph's profound figuring of suspension that we find a means of formulating an ethics from the aesthetic qualities of Drew's image. Abel draws our attention to DeLillo's interest in the ethical possibilities of suspension in his reading of DeLillo's 'In the Ruins of the Future: Reflections on

⁶¹³ See Ian Jeffrey, *The Photography Book* (London; New York: Phaidon Press Ltd, 1997), 10 and 83 respectively. While the veracity of Capa's image has been disputed, for my purposes here, it is not essential to know whether the image was staged or not. What is important in this instance is that people believed they were looking at the moment a soldier had been killed.

⁶¹⁴ Lurie, 'Falling Persons', 44.

⁶¹⁵ See for example Hirsch's description of meeting with friends to compare photographs taken that day. Hirsch, 'Day Time'.

Terror and Loss in the Shadow of September.⁶¹⁶ Published barely three months after the attacks, DeLillo's article is comprised of eight textual fragments, placed alongside haunting photographs from James Fee's 'Photographs of America' series.⁶¹⁷ Each fragment situates the attacks in a different narrative context, from a discussion of global politics and economics, through to DeLillo recounting his nephew's personal experience. While Kauffman reads this fragmented article as attempting to do battle against the failure of language in the presence of the 'absence, emptiness, the howling space of the void' left by the attacks,⁶¹⁸ Abel argues that in:

[r]esisting the demand to speak with moral clarity and declare what the event means, [DeLillo's] essay instead shows that response is always a question of response-ability, or the ethical how. DeLillo stylistically configures response-ability as always and necessarily a question of how rather than what; (e)valuation rather than representation; the power of the false rather than the regime of truth.⁶¹⁹

Reading 'In the Ruins' as replicating the aesthetic conventions of André Bazin's neorealist cinema, Abel suggests that in producing a fragmented rather than coherent narrative in response to the attacks, DeLillo forces the reader to participate in constructing the significance of the attacks. The 'event' becomes that which emerges in the interchange between different narratives and different perspectives, rather than being inserted into an external pre-figured idea of what constitutes an event. Thus, Abel suggests:

DeLillo's image events resonate aesthetically and ethically with those of neorealist cinema: faced with the impossibility yet necessity of responding to events that exceed immediate explanation, both kinds enact their response-ability to show how intensely inhabiting – suspending – an event can bring ethical responsibility to it.⁶²⁰

Suspension, therefore, holds ethical potential as it opens up the possibility of response. Echoing both Irigaray and Spivak's demand that we suspend our epistemological frameworks in order to avoid appropriating the other with our own terms, so Abel figures DeLillo's suspension of narrative mastery as sowing the seeds of response-ability.

Highlighting the coincidences in narrative structure, theme, and even the recurrence phrases such as "I'm standing here,"⁶²¹ Kauffman convincingly argues that *Falling Man*

⁶¹⁶ Don DeLillo, 'In the Ruins of the Future: Terror and Loss in the Shadow of September', *Harper's Magazine*, December 2001.

⁶¹⁷ See www.jamesfee.com.

⁶¹⁸ Linda S. Kauffman, 'The Wake of Terror: Don DeLillo's "In the Ruins of the Future," "Baader-Meinhof," and "Falling Man"', *Modern Fiction Studies* 54, no. 2 (2008): 357.

⁶¹⁹ Marco Abel, 'Don DeLillo's "In the Ruins of the Future": Literature, Images and the Rhetoric of Seeing 9/11', *PMLA* 118, no. 5 (2003): 1236.

⁶²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1241.

⁶²¹ DeLillo, 'Ruins', 38; and DeLillo, *Falling*, 25.

develops the thinking that initially appeared in 'In the Ruins.' This renders Abel's turn to neorealist cinema for establishing DeLillo's ethics of suspension problematic, for it is a photograph, not a moving image, that the novel's title invokes. Indeed, in focusing on Bazin's cinematic critique, Abel does not take into account that Bazin himself argues that temporality of the cinematic image acts as a record of change as 'the image of things is likewise the image of their duration, change mummified as it were.'⁶²² For Bazin, a more fundamental suspension takes place through the creation of the photograph. In describing the family photo album, Bazin detects:

the disturbing presence of lives halted at a set moment in their duration, freed from their destiny; not, however, by the prestige of art but by the power of an impassive mechanical process: for photography does not create eternity, as art does, it embalms time, rescuing it simply from its proper corruption.⁶²³

In Bazin's formulation then, 'cinema is objectivity in time,' whereas the photograph enacts a permanent suspension reminiscent of amber's preservation of pre-historic insects.⁶²⁴ Yet just as the body of the 'Falling Man' strips away Keith's capacity to insert his surroundings into a pre-figured model of the world, so the images of the attacks in Manhattan work to disrupt the distinctions between the filmic and the photographic as they enter the text. As Lianne watches the news footage in the days after the attack, we are told:

Every time she saw a videotape of the planes she moved a finger toward the power button on the remote. Then she kept on watching. The second plane coming out of that ice blue sky, this was the footage that entered the body, that seemed to run beneath her skin, the fleeting sprint that carried lives and histories, theirs and hers, everyone's, into some other distance, out beyond the towers.⁶²⁵

Lianne has had access to the seventeen minutes of footage from that particular Tuesday morning so often that she has already formed the habit of reaching for the remote 'every time' they appear. Moreover, she is compelled to keep on watching. Through Lianne, DeLillo suggests that in obsessively replaying the same footage, by continually revisiting the same instant in time, the media and the audience began to treat this series of moving images like a photograph. The repeated looping of the video images acted as a means to counteract the inevitable movement beyond the moment, in order that we could look again, for longer, trying to absorb what was before us. The repetition of this visual material suggested that the swiftness of the action and the concurrent brevity of the film did not permit us the time we

⁶²² André Bazin, *What Is Cinema? Vol. 1*. (Berkley, LA.; London: University of California Press, 2005), 15.

⁶²³ Ibid., 14.

⁶²⁴ Ibid.

⁶²⁵ DeLillo, *Falling*, 134.

need, or desire, to look at such images. In other words, the footage demanded the kind of spectatorship evoked by the photographic image.

Thus, DeLillo suggests that neither existing models of photographic nor filmic spectatorship were sufficient to help us interpret the material brutality that unfolded before us. This dismantling of pre-existing 'modes of perception', to paraphrase Bazin, permeates *Falling Man*. This emerges as Lianne and Keith watch the footage of the attacks together for the first time:

He watched with her. Every helpless desperation set against the sky, human voices crying to God and how awful to imagine this, God's name on the tongues of the killers and victims both, first one plane and then the other, the one that was nearly cartoon human, with flashing eyes and teeth, the second plane, the south tower.⁶²⁶

The actual soundtrack of the footage is absent, replaced by the cries to God that they know will have been uttered in those final moments. Yet there is a very distinct soundtrack from that day, first of low flying planes, the sounds of the impacts, the increasingly alarmed responses from the people in Manhattan, the myriad sirens, the appalling thuds of bodies hitting glass and ground, the roar of the towers collapsing. In separating sight from sound, DeLillo leaves the film operating in the purely visual manner reminiscent of the photograph, and it is the disruption of the distinction between photographic and filmic modes that enacts a suspension of pre-figuration that allows the spectators' imaginations to interact with what they are witnessing. This motif is continually revisited in *Falling Man*, as soundtracks and moving images are peeled away from one another. In contrast to the blaring presence of television in DeLillo's *White Noise* (1985), television does not make itself felt as a frenetic outpouring of visual and audio information in *Falling Man*. For example as the Neudeckers watch a poker game, Lianne is drawn in by the players' 'faces in close-up,' leading her to 'imagin[e] a northern bleakness, faces misplaced in the desert.'⁶²⁷ As the silent, relatively motionless images allow Lianne's imagination to wander, in the same instant the television screen leads Keith to contemplate Lianne: '[h]e saw her face reflected in a corner of the screen. He was watching the cardplayers and noting the details of move and countermove but also watching her and feeling this, the sense of being here with them.'⁶²⁸ Deprived of sound, the visual image loses its capacity to engulf consciousness.

Moreover, the movement of the narrative itself resists either purely filmic or photographic modes of perception. At the end of the novel, *Falling Man* enacts the temporal

⁶²⁶ Ibid.

⁶²⁷ Ibid., 117.

⁶²⁸ Ibid., 117.

suspension of a photograph in its return to the opening scene, creating a temporal join so seamless it is possible to read the closing paragraph as preceding the novel's opening lines:

He went past a line of fire trucks and they stood empty now, headlights flashing. He could not find himself in the things he saw and heard. Two men ran by with a stretcher, someone face-down, smoke seeping out of his hair and clothes. He watched them move into the stunned distance. That's where everything was, all around him, falling away, street signs, people, things he could not name.

Then he saw a shirt come down out of the sky. He walked and saw it fall, arms waving like nothing in this life.⁶²⁹

It was not a street anymore but a world, a time and space of falling ash and near night. He was walking north through rubble and mud and there were people running past holding towels to their faces or jackets over their heads.⁶³⁰

Yet just as returning to the text with knowledge of Keith's experience in the Tower changes the manner in which we read his narrative, so the text's perpetual movement away from and return to particular scenes complicates the perceived differences in photographic and filmic temporality. If for both Bazin and Barthes, cinematic or filmic temporality is distinguished from photographic time by its 'protensive' reproduction of the linear progression of past-present-future,⁶³¹ such temporal distinctions are blurred as we repeatedly return to a kind of *tableau vivant* in which Lianne visits her mother Nina in the novel's first 150 pages.⁶³² Although the scene is framed by the arrival and departure of Nina's lover Martin, each time we return to the apartment, only a matter of minutes have passed in contrast to the overall progression of the novel. For example, at the close of the first scene, we hear the apartment's buzzer announce that "[t]his would be Martin on the way up,"⁶³³ and when we return twenty-eight pages later, we find Lianne only just opening the door to him: 'Martin embraced her in the doorway, gravely,'⁶³⁴ while in the final revisiting of the apartment over one-hundred pages later, we told '[i]t was only five minutes ago that Martin had walked out the door.'⁶³⁵ The frequent return to this scene and its relatively sparse narrative progression invokes something of the suspended temporality of the photograph. But at the same time, each time we return to Nina, Martin, and Lianne, the previous visit has provided us with knowledge exterior to the moment, which in turn inflects the scene with different meaning. We learn about the relationships between Lianne, Keith, Nina and Martin, both past and present. We are given an array of responses to the recent attacks, from personal awe at Keith's survival to an angry exchange of views that

⁶²⁹ Ibid., 246.

⁶³⁰ Ibid., 3.

⁶³¹ Barthes, *Camera*, 89–90.

⁶³² DeLillo, *Falling*, 8–13, 41–49, 111–116, 144–149.

⁶³³ Ibid., 13.

⁶³⁴ Ibid., 41.

⁶³⁵ Ibid., 144.

apparently echo the wider responses of the U.S. as opposed to Europe. Finally, we learn that Martin is in fact Ernst Hechinger, a one-time member of Kommune One and potentially the Red Brigade, but whose activities on behalf of these groups remains unclear. Thus, by repeatedly returning to this relatively still moment of narrative action despite of the surrounding narrative progress of the novel, DeLillo sets up a tension between the photograph's refusal to let a moment slip into the past and the moving image's narrative motion. For each time we return to the scene, our understanding of it has changed, imbuing it with narrative progress in spite of its stillness.

Suspending the moment in Nina's apartment across the novel rather than collapsing it into one complete scene allows us to develop a new understanding of what it is we are witnessing each time the text enters the room. Moreover, such a suspension only becomes possible by rejecting both photographic and filmic temporalities, turning instead to a specifically literary form of narrative. It is significant, then, that it is in this extended scene that DeLillo explicitly places the violence of September 11th attacks alongside the aesthetic. For as Martin and Nina attempt to insert the attacks into narratives of socio-economic or an expression of 'violent need'⁶³⁶ respectively, the presence of 'two beautiful Morandi still lifes'⁶³⁷ in the apartment works to undercut the possibility that there is one correct way to "see" the attacks. For as Martin pauses in front of the paintings, he confesses his confusion to Nina and Lianne:

"I'm looking at these objects, kitchen objects but removed from the kitchen, free of the kitchen, the house, everything practical and functioning. And I must be back in another time zone. I must be even more disoriented than usual after a long flight," he said, pausing. "Because I keep seeing the towers in this still life."

Lianne joined him at the wall

She saw what he saw. She saw the towers.⁶³⁸

If Martin locates his confusion in the physical disorientation brought on by jet-lag, the fact that Lianne shares his altered perception of Morandi's painting implies that there is something else at work. What unites Lianne and Martin is their mutual experience of watching the attacks on Manhattan unfold on television. Hence, in this moment, DeLillo suggests this experience has inflected their visual perception, leading them to detect the presence of the towers amid Morandi's collection of household objects. Moreover, this experience has collapsed the ability to draw a clear distinction between the painting and the photographic and filmic images generated by the attacks. The possibility of adopting a correct mode of perception, of inserting

⁶³⁶ Ibid., 112.

⁶³⁷ Ibid., 45.

⁶³⁸ Ibid., 49.

these contrasting images into a *studium*, is undermined by each viewer's individual experience of witnessing those images. Yet despite both experiencing a similar transformation in their perceptual fields, Lianne and Martin are not homogenised by their experience; they do not merge into a group mind as terrorism discourses presume. Their perception is rather simultaneously inflected with their personal experiences in such a way as to bring them into discord. As a European and one-time activist, Martin views the attacks through different eyes to Lianne, who watched the destruction of the towers as New Yorker, as a woman who knew her estranged husband was supposed to be in the buildings. The contrast in their views leaves Lianne wondering years later why 'she'd stayed in touch with him. The disincentives were strong . . . It was guilt by association, his, when the towers fell.'⁶³⁹

For Baudrillard and Žižek, perceiving the profusion of images that recorded the atrocity as it unfolded was a matter of adjusting the spectatorship reserved for Hollywood disaster films to allow for the fact that these images are reporting reality: '[r]ather than the violence of the real being there first, and the *frisson* of the image being added to it, the image is there first, and the *frisson* of the real is added.'⁶⁴⁰ Indeed, as Lianne and Keith watch the footage of the attacks together, Keith's response demonstrates how rapidly such an adjustment can be made:

He said, "It still looks like an accident, the first one. Even from this distance, way outside the thing, how many days later, I'm standing here thinking it's an accident."
 "Because it has to be."
 "It has to be," he said.
 "The way the camera sort of shows surprise."
 "But only the first one."
 "Only the first one," she said.
 "The second plane, by the time the second plane appears," he said, "we're all a little older and wiser."⁶⁴¹

But by embodying the perception of terror, DeLillo renders Keith's 'all' quietly ironic. For as we see, Keith's proximity to the violence that others only watched on television induces such a profound rupture in his perceptual field that he is unable to comprehend what he sees. Furthermore, as he escapes the North Tower, he has yet to understand what has happened, left in a world that resembles 'nothing in this life.'⁶⁴² Similarly, Lianne and Martin's personal experience and history differentiate their altered perception so as to challenge the possibility that a uniform wisdom arose as the second plane struck. In *Falling Man*, then, the body works to frustrate the notion of a formless audience upon which terrorism discourses rely.

⁶³⁹ Ibid., 191.

⁶⁴⁰ Baudrillard, *Spirit*, 29.

⁶⁴¹ DeLillo, *Falling*, 135.

⁶⁴² Ibid., 246.

Having said this, DeLillo's turn to the body also suggests he is in accord with Lentricchia and McAuliffe's view that this terroristic moment stripped away the 'film of familiarity' that enables us to perceive the world through culturally-constructed ways of seeing. But rather than figuring this stripping away of the familiar as producing universal effects, DeLillo suggests that it is the rush to wisdom, the speed with which we are presumed to install or adjust another mode of perception, in place of that which has been so violently torn asunder, that allows us to figure the experience of terror as universal. Such a rapid reinstallation of a perceptive mode forecloses the possibility of responding to the attacks in a manner that remains faithful to what took place, as we instead acquiesce to the pre-figured in accordance with Baudrillard. As we shall see, DeLillo's implication is that the speed with which September 11th was understood entirely through established photographic and filmic modes of looking has specific ethical consequences. But at the same time, *Falling Man* suggests that in tarrying with the experience of the attacks, in suspending the rush to narrative explanation and development, it is possible to produce a response not pre-figured by existing modes of perceiving the world. By suspending the text between Keith's experience in the Tower, DeLillo gives us narratives that interweave, move slowly forwards, but at the same, reflect on the past, but that always return the initial moment. As such, *Falling Man's* suspended temporality allows the experiences and impact of September 11th to be felt in a manner that does not reduce them to an overarching march of narrative. In other words, in remaining faithful to the materiality of the 'Falling Man' image, DeLillo simultaneously produces an ethical approach that remains faithful to the materiality of the man it portrays. By adopting the aesthetics of suspension accidentally formulated by the interaction of the man's fall and the action of the camera's shutter, DeLillo creates a text that resists the appropriation of this individual's life and death via insertion into a concrete narrative exterior to his suffering. Thus, while Thurschwell suggests 'that the aesthetics of falling, the beauty of falls, the narrative arc and coherence of falls, seem to lead inevitably to an aestheticising of, a making sense of, others' suffering',⁶⁴³ *Falling Man* refigures the aesthetic qualities of the fall to produce an ethical resistance to such narrative coherence.

If for McEwan, and for terrorism discourses, the literary represents a potentially terroristic space, it is through the interaction of the aesthetic and the material in embodied perception that *Falling Man* posits we can find an ethical way in which to honour those people, dressed for a day at work, who became such haunting falling figures, those people whose deaths were so far beyond the cultural imagination that we still have no word, no phrase, to

⁶⁴³ Pamela Thurschwell, 'Forecasting Falls: Icarus from Freud to Auden to 9/11', *Oxford Literary Review* 30 (2008): 214.

describe the helplessness and hopelessness of murder by forced suicide. Most significantly, *Falling Man* echoes Irigaray's argument that it is by recognising our own bodily experience that we can respect the lives of those who slipped passed the grasp of existing language in the nature of their death. As we turn to the presence of the horizontal and vertical in the novel, we see DeLillo recognising that sexuate identity plays a crucial role in shaping our experience and that a failure to pay attention to difference results in a perpetuation of violence. Perhaps it is in *Falling Man*, then, that we find a means of bringing Irigaray's ethical sensible transcendental to bear on terrorism discourses.

Vertical Masculinities and Aesthetic Falls

While several critics concur with Kauffman in arguing that Keith is 'the falling man who has lost his moorings,'⁶⁴⁴ his fall is largely read in terms of a form of social fall from grace as he eventually turns his back on his family and immerses himself in 'the aleatory world of professional poker.'⁶⁴⁵ Yet reading Keith's descent as a purely social fall not only presumes that his actions represent a form of moral decline, it also fails to recognise that his descent begins with an involuntary ascent, an ascent instigated by the sight of a falling man peeling away the film of familiarity. As Keith begins to descend from his office, he increasingly fails to inhabit the environment as his mind works to make sense of what he has just witnessed:

Someone took his arm and led him forward for a few steps and then he walked on his own, in his sleep, and for an instant he saw it again, going past the window, and this time he thought it was Rumsey. He confused it with Rumsey, the man falling sideways, arm out and up, like pointed up, like why am I here instead of there.⁶⁴⁶

Now able to identify the falling figure as a man, Keith is still unable to give the image a coherence that prevents interpretive slippages, leaving it open and ambiguous, allowing Keith to confuse Rumsey with the falling figure. He becomes a sleepwalker existing in an undreamed landscape, with his mind making phantasmatic connections. Returning again to the moment he emerges into the outside world, we see:

[h]e could not find himself in the things he saw and heard. Two men ran by with a stretcher, someone face-down, smoke seeping out of his hair and clothes. He watched them move into the stunned silence. That's where everything was, all around him, falling away, street signs, people, things he could not name.

⁶⁴⁴ Kauffman, 'Wake', 369.

⁶⁴⁵ David Martin Jones and M. L. R. Smith, 'Terror and the Liberal Conscience: Political Fiction and Jihad – The Novel Response to 9/11', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 33 (September 20, 2010): 935.

⁶⁴⁶ DeLillo, *Falling*, 244.

Then he saw a shirt come down out of the sky. He walked and saw it fall, arms waving like nothing in this life.⁶⁴⁷

As Keith's world physically collapses around him, so too does his ability to make use of that world to 'find himself' in it. Without the perceptual filters that allow him to read his environment in order to constitute himself, Keith finds himself propelled out of the world, as it falls away from him. Unable to coordinate his bodily senses and his understanding, Keith becomes curiously absent, guided by others out of the tower and transcending the street to enter into an ethereal 'world, a time and space of falling ash and near night.'⁶⁴⁸ His disconnection from the physical becomes pronounced in the days after his escape, for he does not interact with the physical world. Rather, others push him through the world as he enters a passive state; Lianne ties his hospital gown, an 'orderly put him in a wheelchair and pushed him,'⁶⁴⁹ doctors 'tested him' and 'took the glass out of his face.'⁶⁵⁰ Keith merely sits or lies, watching and listening to what is going on around him as people 'told him things he could not absorb.'⁶⁵¹ Returning to his own apartment, Keith is unable to associate himself with 'the man who used to live here,' before pausing to say to himself "I'm standing here," and then, louder, "I'm standing here."⁶⁵² It is as if, for Keith as for the Alzheimer's patients, the most fundamental assumption of a connection between the mind and body has been erased. Keith can see the world around him, but is unable to locate himself within it. He has to resort to language in order to situate himself. His missing sense of physicality is noticed by others too, as Lianne realises that 'He was a hovering presence now . . . He was not quite returned to his body yet.'⁶⁵³ Witnessing another's fall without a means of comprehending it, then, has launched Keith into a disembodied state, hovering above the world.

Significantly, as Keith resorts to speaking out loud in order to situate himself in his apartment, he also attempts to insert his surroundings in a filmic narrative:

In the movie version, someone would be in the building, an emotionally damaged woman or a homeless old man, and there would be dialogue and close-ups.⁶⁵⁴

Similarly, in the days after the attacks, Florence plays music "'like movie music in those old movies when the man and the woman run through the heather,'" as she needs this soundtrack

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid., 246.

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid., 3.

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid., 15.

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁵¹ Ibid.

⁶⁵² Ibid., 27.

⁶⁵³ Ibid., 59.

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid., 27.

“to make [the attacks] go away.”⁶⁵⁵ Yet she herself admits she only likes the music “when it’s playing in the movie,” suggesting that in choosing to play the music without the film, she is trying to substitute herself into such a movie in the wake of her experiences in the North Tower.⁶⁵⁶ As Florence recounts these experiences to Keith, it becomes apparent that such attempts to situate oneself in filmic narratives work against the profound physicality of the close proximity to the attacks, as her narrative resorts to spatial rather than temporal description:

This is where bottles of water were passed up the line from somewhere below . . . This is where the firemen went racing past, going up the stairs, into it, and people got out of the way.

This is also where she saw someone she knew, going up, a maintenance man, a guy she joked with whenever she saw him . . .⁶⁵⁷

If the experience within the towers transforms narrative time into a series of situational conjunctions, this suggests that the recourse to abstract, filmic narrative will not aid the return to earth from a state of involuntary transcendence. Indeed, it is as Keith runs through the physiotherapy for his injured wrist that we see the beginnings of his return to his body:

He found these sessions restorative, four times a day, the wrist extensions, the ulnar deviations. These were the true countermeasures to the damage he’d suffered in the towers, in the descending chaos. It was not the MRI and not the surgery that brought him closer to well-being. It was this modest home program, the counting of seconds, the counting of repetitions, the times of day he reserved to the exercises, the ice he applied following each set of exercises.⁶⁵⁸

As much as the interventions of the medical world have helped to repair the physical damage Keith suffered in the attacks, it is something in these minute, regular movements of his body that work to ‘restore’ his sense of self. The routine of repetition, the synchronisation of body and time through the counting of seconds, the simplicity of a ‘home program’; these elements help realign Keith’s body, mind, and environment, in the wake of the ‘descending chaos.’ There is a connection here between verticality and the disruption of the familiar, highlighted again as the passage continues:

There were the dead and maimed. His injury was slight but it wasn’t the torn cartilage that was the subject of this effort. It was the chaos, the levitation of ceilings and floors, the voices choking in smoke. He sat in deep concentration, working on the hand shapes, the bend of the wrist toward the floor, the bend of the wrist toward the ceiling, the forearm flat on the table.⁶⁵⁹

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid., 92.

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid., 56–57.

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid., 40.

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid.

Keith's physiotherapy is a means of fighting against the disorder of levitating floors and ceilings, of descending wires, buildings, planes and people. Becoming absorbed in the most simple of wrist movements, a movement anchored by a horizontal arm in which the oscillation between floor and ceiling is small and controlled, this is how Keith begins to put together a sense of reality having had his so violently stripped away.

Keith's fall, then, is not simply a descent into the debauched world of gambling. It is first and foremost a return to the body from a transcendental exteriority. As he returns to domestic life with Lianne and Justin, he is acutely alert to his immanence within the apartment:

He began to think into the day, into the minute. It was being here, alone in time, that made this happen, being away from routine stimulus, all the streaming forms of office discourse. Things seemed still, they seemed clearer to the eye, oddly, in ways he didn't understand. He began to see what he was doing. He noticed things, all the small lost strokes of a day or a minute, how he licked his thumb and used it to lift a bread crumb off the place and put it idly in his mouth. Only it wasn't so idle anymore.⁶⁶⁰

Counteracting the chaotic verticality of his experience of terror becomes a process of working his way back into the everyday through paying attention to his interactions with the world, not letting an alternative film of familiarity construct his perception. Lianne senses this move back into the flesh fifteen days after the attacks, as Keith makes love to Lianne in 'the tenderest sex she's known with him,' in such a way that it was 'a laying open of bodies but also of time, the only interval she'd known in these days and nights that was not forced or distorted, hemmed in by the press of events.'⁶⁶¹ In the wake of this, Lianne feels she can sense the shape Keith's gradual gathering of himself is taking, finally believing he is 'growing into' the term husband, a term 'she'd never felt easy with' before.⁶⁶² Keith, too, seems to feel that his return to his body constitutes a coincidence with the domestic identity, as he announces to Lianne that "'We're ready to sink into our little lives.'"⁶⁶³

Is there a suggestion here that Keith's return to the body leads him into a sensible transcendental state, as his vertical decline coincides with the verticality of every existence? His awareness of himself as an embodied subject and his sexual tenderness towards the body of another would seem to imply this is the case. If this is so, it is deeply problematic for Irigaray's ethical approach, for DeLillo figures such an awareness emerging from the violent exploitation of our fleshly vulnerability. But DeLillo himself complicates the notion that Keith's

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid., 65.

⁶⁶¹ Ibid., 69.

⁶⁶² Ibid., 70.

⁶⁶³ Ibid., 75.

experiences can open a new ethical horizon by placing Keith's involuntarily movement on a vertical axis in parallel with the terrorist Other's voluntary ascent. In the few sections that focus on Hammad and his fellow perpetrators, DeLillo shows these men striving 'against the need to be normal'⁶⁶⁴ in order to facilitate a transcendence of the everyday that will allow them to act in the name of God. In the figure of Hammad, DeLillo gives us a terrorist who starts out as a 'bulky man, clumsy' with 'some unnamed energy . . . sealed in his body, too tight to be released.'⁶⁶⁵ This bulky presence indulges the appetites of his body. He eats twice in four pages,⁶⁶⁶ while his sexual appetites see him stepping 'over the prone form of a brother in prayer as he made his way to the toilet to jerk off,'⁶⁶⁷ lusting after his girlfriend's roommate, and making love to this girlfriend so enthusiastically that 'they did damage to the cot.'⁶⁶⁸ Yet when we next encounter him, after his training in Afghanistan, Hammad's bodily needs are disappearing from the text. He has lost weight, but this appears to be more of a spiritual feat than as a result of physical training, for we are told in Afghanistan:

the landscape consumed him, waterfalls frozen in space, a sky that never ended. It was all Islam, the rivers and streams. Pick up a stone and hold it in your fist, this is Islam. God's name on every tongue throughout the countryside. There was no feeling like this ever in his life.⁶⁶⁹

Not only does Hammad's experience foreshadow Keith's later sense that the attacks created a world that was 'like nothing in this life,' Keith's own encounter with a waterfall leads him to reconsider the reality of his environment.⁶⁷⁰ But unlike Keith, Hammad does not move out of his body; rather his entire body becomes consumed by the transcendental. The instinctive, and in his eyes, increasingly base demands of his physical existence are being assuaged by the growing awareness of God being present in his very flesh. Upon seeing two women walking through the park:

Hammad sat on a bench, alone, watching, and then got up and followed. This was something that just happened, the way a man is pulled out of his skin and then the body catches up.⁶⁷¹

This is not a case of his body's sexual needs propelling him unthinkingly after the women. It is instead his body that 'catches up' and prevents him from pursuing them. His spirituality, his faith, is in his flesh, and it is his unthinking mind that now needs to be monitored.

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid., 83.

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid., 79.

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid., 72 and 82.

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid., 80.

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid., 82.

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid., 172.

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid., 203–204.

⁶⁷¹ Ibid., 176.

In Hammad, DeLillo gives us the divinely-inspired terrorist of terrorism discourses, a man who feels the presence of God in his flesh and is thus willing to use that flesh to act in the name of God. Again, this carries with it overtones of Irigaray's claim that we need to cultivate a sensible transcendental in order to approach the other in an ethical way. But in stark contrast to Irigaray's model, Hammad's divinely-inspired flesh facilitates a radical negation of the other, for as Hammad asks about the fate of their intended victims, Amir tells him that:

there are no others. The others exist only to the degree that they fill the role we have designed for them. This is their function as others. Those who will die have no claim to their lives outside the useful fact of their dying.⁶⁷²

Thus, unlike Lianne's sense that '[h]uman existence had to have a deeper source than our own dank fluids',⁶⁷³ DeLillo figures the terrorist Other as he who fundamentally disavow the existence of the other in order to make use of their materiality. The possibility of difference is so radically shut down that what the intended victims 'hold so precious we see as empty space.'⁶⁷⁴ In reducing the other to the material against which their spiritual climax can be achieved, Hammad and his cohorts ground their spiritual development in the flesh and bone of the other and thus enter into an Irigarayan umbilical relation to that other. Yet in this case, thanks to the perceived presence of God in their flesh, Hammad, Atta, and the others have radicalised this relation. The flesh of the other is no longer simply the basis of a symbolic securing of subjectivity; it has become the actual clay from which they can carve their own transcendental, the means through which they can escape their divinely animated bodies to enter transcendental perfection. Thus while it may appear that Hammad's experience in Afghanistan permitted him a transcendence which he has carried back into his body, the presence of the other as a constitutive space means this becomes a negative movement, carrying into his flesh a justification and a need for death and destruction. It is not the sensible transcendental that inspires Hammad; rather it is what Irigaray has described as the 'insensible sensible transcendental',⁶⁷⁵ a mode of existence that allows the profound appropriation of the other's flesh to achieve one's own sense of transcendence.

DeLillo figures Keith's movement on the vertical plane as thus instigated by Hammad's profoundly negative transcendence, for as Hammad's plane hits the North Tower, their two narrative strands collide into one another:

[Hammad] fastened his seatbelt.

⁶⁷² Ibid.

⁶⁷³ Ibid., 231.

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid., 177.

⁶⁷⁵ My thanks to Professor Irigaray for supplying me with this term in response to this chapter at Irigaray, 'Luce Irigaray International Seminar'.

A bottle fell off the counter in the galley, on the other side of the aisle, and he watched it this way and that, a water bottle, empty, making an arc one way and rolling back the other, and he watched it spin more quickly and then skitter across the floor an instant before the aircraft struck the tower, heat, then fuel, then fire, and a blast wave passed through the structure that sent Keith Neudecker out of his chair and into a wall.⁶⁷⁶

If Keith is propelled out of the everyday horizon by a meeting of the symbolic and the material constituted by a radical negation of the other, it is little wonder that we find Keith's descent figures not a transformation, but a hardening of the subjective boundaries that were under attack. For the attempt by the terrorist Other to exploit his flesh, to effectively place him in the position reserved for the maternal-feminine in a phallic economy, brings about an even sturdier assertion of Keith's masculinity. For if domesticity and sensual awareness briefly coincide with the course of his descent, we soon see Keith turning to another kind of embodiment in order to locate himself in the world once more:

Keith stood at the rear of the great open space, people everywhere in motion, blood pumping. They quick-walked on the treadmills or ran in place, never seeming regimented, never rigidly linked. It was a scene charged with purpose and a kind of elemental sex, rooted sex, women arched and bent, all elbows and knees, neck veins jutting. But there was something else as well. These were the people he knew; if he knew anyone. Here, together, these were the ones he could stand with in the days after. Maybe that's what he was feeling, a spirit, a kinship of trust.⁶⁷⁷

As Keith moves from the gentle rotations of his wrist to identifying himself with the strong, young bodies he sees straining 'against weighted metal'⁶⁷⁸ in the gym, he now defines his physicality through its machine-like capabilities, developing a need to return again and again to the rowing machine despite 'hating every stroke.'⁶⁷⁹ At the same time, as he enters the anonymous world of professional gambling:

He was fitting into something that was made to his shape. He was never more himself than in these rooms . . . These were times when there was nothing outside, no flash of history or memory that he might unknowingly summon in the routine of the cards.⁶⁸⁰

As Keith descends past the horizontal sphere of embodied experience, he reduces the body to something robotic, forgetting it once again. Moreover, he rejects the connection to others opened up by an embodied awareness, preferring instead an anonymous, disconnected life of

⁶⁷⁶ DeLillo, *Falling*, 239.

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid., 143.

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid., 229.

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid., 225.

'automated teller sex.'⁶⁸¹ In falling away from his family and his job to pursue the gambling and exercise regimes he associated with 'gauzy manhood'⁶⁸² prior to the attacks, rather than undergoing a transformation, Keith becomes an more complete version of the man he was when he originally left Lianne, a man who 'walked through the apartment, bent slightly to one side, a twisted guilt in his smile, ready to break up a table and burn it so he could take out his dick and piss on the flames.'⁶⁸³

In tracing Keith's descent, DeLillo yet again offers us a reading that defies the kind of Hollywood logic that would seek to find a meaningful transformation emerging from Keith's experiences. If Keith has involuntarily been propelled out of the everyday and into the aesthetic sphere by the violent disruption of the familiar, the knowledge he carries back with him into the world makes him more determined to consolidate himself into his notion of masculinity, and to do so at the risk of losing all that conventional wisdom tells him he should now hold dear. Moreover, if de Man tells us that the aesthetic is characterised by verticality, it is an experience that resembles that of mountain climber in comparison to 'wanderer and the seafarer' who remain in the horizontal, in that 'death is present in a more radical way than in the experiences of active life.'⁶⁸⁴ Forced into the aesthetic by the terrorist Other's appropriation of his flesh, Keith's descent into the everyday radically inscribes the desire to inflict death on another in his flesh, for as Lianne realises:

"You want to kill somebody," she said . . . It was in his skin, maybe just a pulse at the side of the forehead, the faintest cadence in a small blue vein. She knew there was something that had to be satisfied, a matter discharged in full, and she thought this was at the heart of his restlessness.

"Too bad I can't join the army. Too old," he said, "or I could kill without penalty and then come home and be a family."⁶⁸⁵

Having been forced up to aesthetic heights, what was his everyday no longer holds comfort for Keith. He becomes the subject who feels the excess of time, the restriction of space, and thus escapes to the timeless, anonymous spaces of the gambling circuit, putting everything on the line to make others 'bleed. Make them spill their precious losers' blood.'⁶⁸⁶ Attempting to recreate the sensation of verticality within the horizons of the everyday is the only way in which Keith can keep the knowledge he carries with him in his dreams alone, a knowledge of just what it is to exist within these horizons:

⁶⁸¹ Ibid., 233.

⁶⁸² Ibid., 97.

⁶⁸³ Ibid., 104.

⁶⁸⁴ de Man, 'Sublimation', 46.

⁶⁸⁵ DeLillo, *Falling*, 214.

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid., 230.

These were the days after and now the years, a thousand heaving dreams, the trapped man, fixed limbs, the dream of paralysis, the gasping man, the dream of asphyxiation, the dream of helplessness.⁶⁸⁷

This man not only resembles de Man's constrained artist, who feels to claustrophobic effect the limits of the everyday, but also recalls Keith's friend and colleague, Rumsey, left fatally wounded by the attacks. As Keith tries to lift Rumsey out of their collapsing office, Keith realises that thanks to Rumsey's injuries, '[t]he whole business of being Rumsey was in a shambles now.'⁶⁸⁸ Thus, it is in working to disavow his embodied subjectivity in order to achieve something close to an ideal phallic masculinity that Keith resists the appropriative violence that he saw fundamentally unravel his friend's subjectivity.

In figuring Keith and Hammad's narratives as progressing along a vertical axis, DeLillo not only foregrounds the possibility that both the victim's masculinity and the deviant masculinity of the terrorist Other exist in a similar vertical relation to the world, but he also suggests that remaining in the vertical axis leads to the perpetuation of violence. It is significant then, that in his descent past the embodied moment in pursuit of a sensually-numb mode of existence, Keith reinstalls the perceptual filters that were so violently rendered useless. For as Keith observes, in the visual and audio hubbub of a casino '[y]ou have to break through the structure of your own stonework habit just to make yourself listen.'⁶⁸⁹ It is precisely because Keith 'didn't want to listen'⁶⁹⁰ anymore that he has turned to this highly-structured environment to forget his body. But if Keith finds fitting himself into a cultural stereotype and cultivating a *studium* mode of perception the best means of reconstituting himself in the face of the terrorist's Other appropriation, DeLillo suggests that these very modes of thinking lay behind the terrorists' actions. For while Hammad scorns the '[w]rong-eyed men and women laughing on TV',⁶⁹¹ he knows full well that his actions will place him on that screen, 'and liked to imagine himself appearing on the screen, a videotaped figure walking through the gate-like detector on his way to the plane.'⁶⁹² Indeed, the conspirators believe the image has the capacity to thwart their attempts, as they imagine the vast array of observational equipment the state has at its disposal, including 'photo reconnaissance that takes a picture of a dung beetle from one hundred kilometers up.'⁶⁹³

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid., 230.

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid., 243.

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid., 229.

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁹¹ Ibid., 175.

⁶⁹² Ibid., 173.

⁶⁹³ Ibid., 81.

The attackers share a faith in the significance of the image with those they wish to negate, to such an extent that they are aware that images are precisely that which could prevent their actions. Their faith in the image is such that it becomes the means through which they will change the world. Amir tells Hammad that '[t]he world changes first in the mind of the man who wants to change it,'⁶⁹⁴ and their means of enacting this change is by grabbing hold of the global narrative unfolding daily on news channels the world over. Instead of being 'crowded out by other cultures, other futures, the all-enfolding will of capital and foreign policies,'⁶⁹⁵ they will hijack control of the narrative by harnessing the power of the image for their own ends. Hence, DeLillo figures the terrorist Other as sharing Baudrillard's notion that the image has the power to shape the perception of reality. Moreover, such a faith is grounded in modes of perceiving the image that coincide with photojournalist ways of looking, as they presume that the images their actions will produce will be read as testifying to the "fact" that their violence institutes a "real" change in the global narrative of power. Hence, in showing Keith and Hammad operating on a shared vertical plain, DeLillo suggests that to assume that we already had an appropriate way of "seeing" the September 11th attacks in the models of photojournalistic and filmic viewing is, in fact, to foreclose the possibility of responding to such violence. Instead, remaining within pre-established modes of looking ensured that the only response available to this extreme co-option of image was to become a more extreme version of what we were before the planes crashed into the towers. Thus, in *Falling Man* we see terrorism discourses sharing the same perceptual framework as the terrorist Other, a common ground that suggests counter-terrorism can never be a response, only an attempt to more fully assert ourselves in the face of the terrorist Other.

Embodied Terror and the Sensible Transcendental

If the terrorist Other is figured as sharing the photojournalist mode of perception, DeLillo's decision to "embody" the image of the 'Falling Man' in David Janiak's performances becomes more than O'Hagan's 'intellectual escapism.' Furthermore, if DeLillo suggests Keith and Hammad are united in their mutual occupation of a vertical axis, it is significant that it is Lianne who encounters Janiak's *tableau vivant*. For if *Falling Man* concurs with Irigaray's thought in figuring the vertical as the domain of phallic masculinity, DeLillo also implies that it is Lianne's position outside of this axis that opens up the possibility of cultivating an alternative mode of perception, one that does not re-inscribe modes that existed prior to the vicious

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid., 80.

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid.

peeling away of the film of the familiar. If DeLillo's description of Keith's embodied experience of terror complicates the terrorism discourses' epistemological construction of the mass audience with the notion that proximity plays a vital role in the perception of violence, Lianne's physicality implies that our bodies locate us in the world in different ways, such that the possibility of a universal experience of perception is foreclosed thanks to our innately different relations to our environment. By bringing Lianne into contact with the media, photography, Morandi's still lifes, and David Janiak, DeLillo not only echoes Gordimer and Lessing in figuring the female body as a site that resists the epistemological assumptions that underwrite terrorism discourses; he suggests that women's immanence in the material facilitates experiences which, if cultivated, can constitute a response to September 11th that does not come from pre-established frameworks.

In the days after the attacks, in which '[e]verything seemed to mean something'⁶⁹⁶ for Lianne, we see her turning to the newspapers in an attempt to divine the significance of what has happened. She scrutinises Mohammad Atta's 'face in the newspaper', finding only 'hard eyes that seemed too knowing to belong to a face on a driver's license.'⁶⁹⁷ Similarly, she reads the profiles of the victims published in the newspapers, as '[n]ot to read them, every one, was an offense, a violation of responsibility and trust. But she also read them because she had to, out of some need she did not try to interpret.'⁶⁹⁸ Lianne's interaction with the media is imbued with the same sense of duty that calls for the rejection of the aesthetic in the wake of terrorism, a call that leaves its own motives unexamined. But if Lianne replicates this sense of duty, she is simultaneously aware of the reductive qualities of such representation. For as the media and the political rhetoric after the attacks produce stereotypes of the terrorist Other, something in Lianne resists the "truths" they espouse: '[t]hey're the ones who think alike, talk alike, eat the same food at the same time. She knew this wasn't true.'⁶⁹⁹ Just as Lianne's personal experience disrupts her ability to distinguish between Morandi's still life in Nina's apartment and the images of September 11th, so too does her own awareness destabilise her ability to coalesce her reading of the attacks with the media's representations.

Indeed, as Lianne visits an exhibition of Giorgio Morandi's work in a Chelsea art gallery three years after the attacks, we see the aesthetic qualities of his drawings and paintings opening up an entirely new perceptual field for Lianne. In placing Morandi's work in the text, DeLillo not only remains faithful to the context of his novel, for there was indeed an exhibition

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid., 67.

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid., 19.

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid., 106.

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid., 68.

of Morandi's work held in New York in 2004,⁷⁰⁰ but he also makes explicit *Falling Man's* concern with modes of perception. For as Boehm notes, Morandi's seemingly obsessive representations of everyday objects found in a rural Italian kitchen means that '[v]ariety comes about not through subject-matter but through how it is observed; the imagination in the choice of theme is completely ruled out.'⁷⁰¹ Morandi's concern is not so much the meaning inherent in the objects he is depicting, but the process of perception, as the objects depicted are 'mere armatures for the articulation of the picture plane and the play with spatial illusion.'⁷⁰² As such, Boehm argues that in Morandi's work:

Objects often overlap the pictorial horizon, linking 'above' and 'below.' The lower part of the picture is then reinterpreted: instead of a base, it is a flat rectangle parallel to the picture plane on which the upper rectangle rests. Only the two together constitute the picture. They create an order in which plane and space interact. Space becomes indistinguishable from the object. Their synthesis surpasses everyday experience, whose perceptual model insists on keeping them separate.⁷⁰³

Morandi, then, is an artist whose primary interest is disrupting the film of familiarity in order that the spectator becomes aware of how their perceptual processes construct their sense of the everyday. His drawings and paintings are designed to alert the viewer to the fact that our perception of the everyday is in fact a particular mode of looking, one that projects our pre-figured understanding onto the world rather than a simple absorption of the sensual data that passes before our eyes. As Lianne stands before Morandi's work a second time, it is precisely this resistance to the projection of pre-figured interpretation that alerts her to what it is to be a perceiving being:

She wasn't sure why she was looking so intently. She was passing beyond pleasure into some kind of assimilation. She was trying to absorb what she saw, take it home, wrap it around her, sleep in it. There was so much to see. Turn it into living tissue, who you are.⁷⁰⁴

Her meditation on Morandi's work takes her beyond a merely visual appreciation of his work, one informed by memory as it is, and passes to a visceral desire, or perhaps more accurately, an epidermic desire, a desire to wrap oneself in the experience and absorb it via a kind of

⁷⁰⁰ Giorgio Morandi Paintings 1950 – 1964, September 24th – December 4th, 2004, Lucas Schoorman Gallery, New York.

http://www.saatchigallery.co.uk/dealers_galleries/Gallery/Lucas+Schoormans+Gallery/1694.html or <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/14/arts/design/14mora.html>

⁷⁰¹ Gottfried Boehm, 'Giorgio Morandi's Artistic Concept', in *Giorgio Morandi: Paintings, Watercolours, Drawings, Etchings*, ed. Ernst-Gerhard Güse and Franz Armin Morat (Munich; Berlin; London; New York: Prestel, 2008), 11.

⁷⁰² Emily Braun, 'Speaking Volumes: Giorgio Morandi's Still Lifes and the Cultural Politics of Strapaese', *Modernism/Modernity* 2, no. 3 (1995): 91.

⁷⁰³ Boehm, 'Morandi', 17–18.

⁷⁰⁴ DeLillo, *Falling*, 210.

tactile osmosis, to allow the information to seep through into living tissue by prolonged, persistent contemplation.

If Lianne shares the unarticulated desire to submit to the authority of the photojournalistic that resists the turn to the aesthetic, she unsurprisingly finds the disruption of her perceptual field disconcerting, leaving her 'unsure' as to what this experience means. Initially, it seems that Lianne equates such a destabilisation of everyday perception with the dementia that led her father to suicide and the Alzheimer's that is dismantling her group's ability to interact with the world, for she seeks out medical reassurance. But even as she is told she has 'a normal morphology,' Lianne 'loved this term but couldn't quite believe it referred to her.'⁷⁰⁵ It is here DeLillo suggests that the aesthetic encounter has the potential to bring about a profound change in our perception of the world, a transformation that constitutes a response to what has occurred. Moreover, it is the aesthetic encounter with a living other that fundamentally alters Lianne's sense of the everyday. As Thurschwell notes, as Lianne recalls Drew's photograph, DeLillo's language collapses into 'something clichéd and unsatisfying.' For Thurschwell, Lianne's claim that this image 'hit her hard when she first saw it,' and that 'this picture had burned a hole in her mind and heart, dear God, he was a falling angel and his beauty was horrific'⁷⁰⁶ is distinctly lacklustre in a DeLillian context, indicating perhaps 'a DeLillo resigned to the poverty of a discourse of falling angels in the face of falling people.'⁷⁰⁷ But arguably, DeLillo's prose deliberately replicates the language which he himself finds dissatisfying, as it is the language adopted by the newspapers in which Lianne first encounters Drew's image. In such a context, the newspaper provides Lianne with a temporal and spatial means within which to understand the image; an appropriate mode of seeing is suggested, albeit an unsatisfactory one, allowing Lianne to understand what she sees in terms of clichéd, hackneyed phrases. Yet when Lianne first witnesses Janiak's performance, she is momentarily propelled back to what it was to see this figure without such an interpretative framework:

Traffic was barely moving now. There were people shouting up at him, outraged at the spectacle, the puppetry of human desperation, a body's last fleet breath and what it held. It held the gaze of the world, she thought. There was the awful openness of it, something we'd not seen, the single falling figure that trails a collective dread, body come down among us all. And now, she thought, this little theater piece, disturbing enough to stop traffic and send her back into the terminal.⁷⁰⁸

When confronted with Janiak's performance, Lianne, and indeed the people around her, have no such contextual clues to hang on to. The world comes to a standstill, people yell out the

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid., 206.

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid., 221–222.

⁷⁰⁷ Thurschwell, 'Forecasting Falls', 225.

⁷⁰⁸ DeLillo, *Falling*, 33.

anger and fear such a disorientation induces, and suddenly, midway through the passage, the boundary between fiction and fact disappears altogether as DeLillo makes both his authorial presence and the presence of the reader explicit. Lianne's thoughts run along in the third person, but as the world grinds to a halt and Janiak dangles above Pershing Square, the unattributed thought that the awful openness was something 'we'd not seen' brings together author, reader, characters and surrounding worlds, fictional and real. It is perhaps in this instance we see DeLillo's true description of horrors induced by the images of the falling, in an instance unstructured by mediation. To talk about the image is to have already accepted some form of prior interpretation, to tacitly establish an appropriate mode for reading it, and thus to close down the possibility of a response that comes from within the event itself. Giving the 'Falling Man' a body then becomes a means of resisting the narratives and interpretative frameworks implicit in the very forms the media takes, replacing them instead with the aesthetic's power to defamiliarise and decontextualise, to leave the audience confronted with the awful openness of possibility, with the responsibility of formulating their own response. Just as the image of the Falling Man traverses the boundaries between photojournalistic mores and aesthetic appreciation, so too Janiak's performance hangs between the reality of a suspended man, damaged by each performance,⁷⁰⁹ and the theatrical interpretation of another's suffering. As the novel pauses in a moment of photographic suspension, DeLillo similarly pulls down the dividing line between the novel's world and ours. At each level, the models we rely on to make sense of planes of reality are swept away.

It is encountering the aesthetics produced by September 11th embodied by a living other that leads Lianne to fully comprehend the significance of her embodied perception. For as she learns of Janiak's death and promptly goes on an information binge on the internet, it becomes clear that his performances were only captured on camera by chance, not by an assistant or pre-warned media. His actions were not designed to be re-inscribed in the photographic lexicon. Moreover, the realisation that there are no photographs of the second performance she witnesses transforms her understanding of what it is to perceive:

There were no photographs of that fall. She was the photograph, the photosensitive surface. That nameless body coming down, this was hers to record and absorb.⁷¹⁰

If Morandi's work instils a sense of embodied perception in Lianne, her encounters with Janiak leave her to formulate this perceptual awareness into an ethical moment. Not only does Lianne's sense of herself as a photosensitive surface alert her to the obligation she has to

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid., 220.

⁷¹⁰ Ibid., 223.

record what the camera has failed to capture, it also allows her to accept that she will never comprehend the motivations behind Janiak's actions:

The man eluded her. All she knew was what she'd seen that day near the schoolyard, a boy bouncing a basketball and a teacher with a whistle on a string. She could believe she knew these people, and all the others she'd seen and heard that afternoon, but not the man who'd stood above her, detailed and looming.

She went to sleep finally on her husband's side of the bed.⁷¹¹

By embodying the 'Falling Man', then, DeLillo critiques the ethical capacity of photojournalistic or purely visual modes of understanding. For it is encountering the living body, suspended in a position that recalls the aesthetics of the attacks, that alerts Lianne to the camera's failure to record all the falls and leads her to realise this falling man is irreducibly other to her. As such, DeLillo implies that the turn to the purely visual for understanding risks forgetting all those whose falls were not captured on camera, a forgetting that foregrounds the lives and deaths of others over those who elude the photographic record. Moreover, in assuming the image gives us access to the subject, we overwrite the subject's irreducible alterity in a way that allows us to colonise their actions with our own attempts at meaning. *Falling Man's* ethical gesture, then, is to create a rift in the visual hegemony that ensures we remember those lives and deaths that eluded our gaze and to remind us that those whose falls are forever suspended in the photographic record should remain as elusive, unknowable, untranslatable as they initially were.

If DeLillo figures Lianne as achieving something like Irigaray's sensible transcendental, it is as she achieves this awareness that he performs the novel's final suspension. Lianne finally makes peace with her new sense of embodiment:

late one night, undressing, she yanked a clean green T-shirt over her head and it wasn't sweat she smelled or maybe just a faint trace but not the sour reek of the morning run. It was just her body and everything it carried, inside and out, identity and memory and human heat. It wasn't even something she smelled so much as knew. It was something she'd always known.⁷¹²

But just as the novel suggests that Lianne has been unaware of this knowledge, of what it means to be an embodied subject, until this moment, so DeLillo ends Lianne's narrative here, resisting the possibility of inscribing Lianne's realisation with meaning by suspending the narrative. In contrast to McEwan, then, DeLillo does not give the reader a sense of what our response to September 11th, 2001, should be. Instead, *Falling Man* enacts a suspension of 'meaningful' narrative precisely in order to represent the ethical limits of such attempts to

⁷¹¹ Ibid., 224.

⁷¹² Ibid., 236.

inscribe meaning on the suffering of others. Hence, if McEwan's turn to the materiality of the body is a means for stabilising identity and securing the West's position as moral arbiter, DeLillo's attentiveness to embodied experience disrupts the epistemological appropriation of the other that allows such a logic to unfold by bringing difference into the horizon of terrorism discourses. Moreover, in his figuring of sexual difference, DeLillo not only gives form to the disembodied audience of terrorism discourses, he does so in a way that unravels the very concept of terror itself. For terror does not have a uniform effect on those who witness it, as their bodies provide a layer of perception that resists undifferentiated commensuration with culturally-prescribed modes of seeing. Most significantly of all, it is when one forgets this embodied perception in favour of the culturally-constructed, one shares the perceptual mode of the terrorist Other. Remembering our bodies and cultivating the knowledge that we carry in our flesh becomes the only means of truly distinguishing ourselves from the terrorist who would make use of our flesh. Until we do so, DeLillo suggests, our phallically-constituted symbolic ensures we remain in the same axis that facilitates terrorism.

Conclusion: Embodying the Brutality of Spectacle

Writing in the years before the prospect of global terrorism had firmly established itself in political sphere, Nadine Gordimer and Doris Lessing had already begun to use literature's potential to re-figure the concept of terrorism in order to critique the more localised rhetoric around terrorism in South Africa and the U.K. They did so specifically by challenging the claims of such discourses to "know" the terrorist Other, destabilising the epistemological authority of those who would define the terrorist by establishing the flesh as marking the limit of knowledge. When the spectacular attacks of September 11th, 2001, launched terrorism discourses into the global sphere as never before, these earlier, localised interventions were rendered mute as the epistemology of terrorism gained a global purchase. The audience of terror had become global and as such, had been reduced to the homogenised mass that underpins the very concept of terrorism. The idea that the body is a site of irreducible incarnate difference that testifies to the irony of an epistemological framework's claims to know the subject it studies was explicitly disavowed as we turned to the experts for a means of understanding and responding to what we had witnessed. For it was understood that everyone had watched the spectacle unfold '[l]ike the rest of the world,'⁷¹³ and as such, had all experienced what we saw in the same way. To suggest otherwise was to garner censure on a global scale, as exemplified by the media's response to Stockhausen's readiness to connect the attacks to the aesthetic, through to the vitriolic and deeply personal attacks on Susan Sontag after her contribution to *The New Yorker's* September 24th, 2001, issue criticised attempts by politicians and the media to figure the terrorists as cowards.⁷¹⁴ To speak of difference, to suggest that there was more than one way of experiencing the supposedly global effects of terror, was to align oneself with "them" rather than with "us". This "us", moreover, was explicitly a masculine universal, as even feminism's attempts to articulate difference were dismissed in the face of globalised terror.

In contrast to works that focus on assessing literature after the September 11th attacks, such as Head's *The State of the Novel* or Keniston and Quinn's *Literature After 9/11*,⁷¹⁵ by placing the literature produced after the attacks alongside Gordimer and Lessing's earlier work, we gain some sense of how far the logic of "us" and "them", of epistemological master and knowable, deviant Other have penetrated literature's response to terrorism. McEwan, it

⁷¹³ Borradori, *Time of Terror*, ix.

⁷¹⁴ See David Talbot's interview with Sontag, 'The "Traitor" Fires Back' in Joseph and Kalpana, *Terror, Counter-terror*, 100–110.

⁷¹⁵ Dominic Head, *The State of the Novel: Britain and Beyond* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008); Ann Keniston and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn, eds., *Literature After 9/11* (London: Routledge, 2008).

seems, is scornful of the reductive manner in which media representation and political rhetoric influence the individual's capacity to respond. Yet he converges with terrorism discourses in claiming that now is the time to firmly proclaim the West's moral authority. Grounding this authority in science's ability to gain epistemological access to the subject, McEwan thus stakes this authority in the same forgetting of the flesh that terrorism discourses rely on. In doing so, McEwan not only reinstalls the conservative notions of masculine and feminine that we detect in terrorism studies, he gives a foretaste of the precarious position that the other is left in as the West increasingly relies on scientific models of embodied identity. For if the scientific becomes the arbiter of normal and abnormal, morally correct and deviant, the scientist is simultaneously allotted the status of epistemological master, a scientist who, as Irigaray suggests, forgets their own embodiment in order to make use of the material world. In turning to science to find the security once accorded to subjectivity through the presence of the transcendental Other, McEwan still leaves the other at our disposal, tellingly manifesting Freud's observation that 'if differences between scientific opinions could ever attain a similar significance [to religious ones] for groups, [war] would again be repeated with this new motivation.'⁷¹⁶

In a striking contrast to McEwan, we have an author who lives near New York continuing Gordimer and Lessing's critique of the epistemological assumptions of terrorism discourses. Can we perhaps read this critical awareness arising from the fact that Don DeLillo, like Gordimer and Lessing before him, inhabits the context that has been afflicted by terror, while McEwan is responding to what was then only an abstract global threat?⁷¹⁷ Thus while McEwan willingly embraces the logic underpinning terrorism discourses, DeLillo, like his predecessors, find such rhetoric problematic, if not dangerous. If Gordimer and Lessing suggest recognising embodied experience destabilises the distinctions between the personal and the political, and with it, the authority of the epistemological gaze that identifies the terrorist Other, DeLillo's embodiment undercuts the possibility of a universal sensation of terror upon which such an epistemology depends. By embodying the experience of terror, DeLillo exposes the extent to which terrorism discourses are dictated by a particular understanding of perception that the terrorists themselves share, a photojournalistic mode of seeing that imbues the image with world-shaping power. In doing so, he does for the formless mass audience of terror what Gordimer and Lessing do for the terrorist Other, as on all sides, these

⁷¹⁶ Freud, 'Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego', 99.

⁷¹⁷ McEwan was writing before the suicide bombings in London in July 2005, although tellingly, when the attack Perowne anticipates comes to fruition, London was attacked by British subjects, not by a foreign Other.

authors illustrate that, in forgetting the body, the epistemology of terrorism replicates an appropriation of the other that replicates the terrorist gesture itself.

By accepting Spivak's assertion that the Humanities holds the ethical in its hands, thanks to its ability to recognise that different discourses have contrasting relations to the dominant ideologies, this thesis has placed terrorism discourses in a critical dialogue with philosophical and literary approaches to terrorism. In doing so, I aimed to demonstrate to what extent such an intervention is capable of opening up a new ethical horizon. If Luce Irigaray's analysis of Western culture's dominant symbolic culture alerted us to the very specific threat violence characterised as terrorist posed to that culture, bringing an Irigarayan analysis of terrorism discourses into dialogue with literature has provided us with a means of applying her work to open up such an ethical horizon. If recognising embodied experience destabilises the epistemologically-constructed boundary between terrorist Other and subject in *Burger's Daughter* and *The Good Terrorist*, in *Falling Man*, paying attention to our own incarnate experience produces an ethics of suspension, a demand that we resist the swift move into understanding before we have paid full attention to what our own flesh tells us in the violent meeting with the other. To turn Luce Irigaray's ethics of the sensible transcendental into dialogue with terrorism discourses, then, is to demand that in the face of bloody exploitation of our materiality, we pause, suspend the rush to narrative and presumed understanding, and listen instead to the unarticulated experience of terror. Then, and only then, will our response to terror differ from what we construct as the terroristic gesture.

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